

# Investigation Uncovers Massive Cockfighting Derby Operating Over the Weekend in Adair County

*Latest finding of illegal cockfighting underscores why organized cockfighting interests have invested in trying to gut Oklahoma's important anti-cruelty law*

STILWELL, OKLAHOMA, UNITED STATES, February 6, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Only two days before the Oklahoma Legislature convenes in Oklahoma City for the second half of the 59th legislative session, more than one hundred cockfighters did their own convening at a metal building in a remote area of Adair County for eight hours of cockfighting and unregulated gambling—both felonies in Oklahoma.



Cockfighting Match

The fighting pit and the derby that occurred there was discovered by Showing Animal Respect and Kindness (SHARK), and it's the latest revelation of a hardened, underground cockfighting community that is disregarding the rule of law and, without shame, petitioning legislators to weaken the law.

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*Kevin Chambers, Oklahoma state director for Animal Wellness Action*

With bills pending in the Legislature to decriminalize their bloodsport, cockfighters felt confident enough to brazenly continue torturing animals in the foothills of the Ozarks some 200 miles east of the state capitol. More than 100 vehicles were parked haphazardly around a wooded clearing littered with rooster cages and trailers. Unbeknownst to them, humane investigators from SHARK and Animal Wellness Action were documenting their

criminal gathering.

Veteran cruelty investigator Steve Hindi of SHARK said the Adair County cockfight was one of the biggest cockfighting derbies he had ever monitored. "There were over a hundred vehicles there," Hindi said. "If the vehicles averaged two people each, that would be easily two hundred people. These are organized criminals, and law enforcement must stop their illegal activities without fear or favor."

Attempts were made to get local law enforcement to shut down the illegal operation but without immediate success—a reminder that getting enforcement of even the existing laws against cockfighting can be frustratingly difficult.

A quite different outcome played out the previous week in Cleveland County, Okla., just 20 miles south of the State Capitol Building. There, Norman City Police and Animal Welfare officers discovered a large cockfighting operation and seized 77 fighting roosters. "The seized roosters were found in deplorable conditions alongside evidence of brutal training and exploitation of the animals for fighting purposes," Norman public information officer Sarah Schettler said.

Kevin Chambers, Oklahoma state director for Animal Wellness Action and a native of Adair County, said that "enforcement of state cockfighting laws has been mixed even though the cruel practice is associated with a host of other crimes, such as illegal gambling, drug trafficking, gang activity, illegal weapon sales, and violence."

"Cockfighters are traveling from all over the U.S. and Mexico to engage in illegal animal fighting and gambling in our state," Chambers said. "Some are even moving here because they see Oklahoma as hospitable for animal fighting. This is outrageous, and it's time for a relentless campaign by law enforcement to shutter the cockfighting pits and animal trafficking and ride Oklahoma of this crime wave."

To help combat cockfighting as well as dogfighting, Animal Wellness Action has launched a new reward program that offers cash compensation not only for information that leads to arrests and convictions, but also for tips on the location of planned or occurring cockfights in the state. The organization will provide \$2,500 to any individual who provides tips to the organization or to law enforcement that results in arrests in Oklahoma for illegal cockfighting under state or federal law. Amounts for other information will vary based on the credibility and timeliness of the tips. People with such knowledge may email [OKcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org](mailto:OKcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org).

Cockfighting has been illegal in Oklahoma since voters banned it by ballot initiative in 2002. Under state law, it is a felony to instigate or encourage a cockfight; to keep places, equipment, or facilities for cockfighting; to service or facilitate a cockfight; or to own, possess, or train roosters with the intent of engaging them in cockfighting. It is a misdemeanor to knowingly spectate a staged cockfight. There is a complementary and overlapping federal statute, which has a provision forbidding any movement of fighting animals within or outside of Oklahoma. SHARK and Animal Wellness Action have documented that cockfighters have shipped tens of thousands

of fighting animals to Mexico, Guam, the Philippines, and other far-off dens of cockfighting. They are consorting with cartel operators who control most of the pits in Mexico.

Congress is also considering a further upgrade of the federal animal fighting law, in the form of the bipartisan FIGHT Act, H.R. 2742/S. 1529. That bill has more than 450 agencies and organizations behind it. It would create a private right of action to allow citizens to sue dogfighters or cockfighters in civil proceedings.

## ASSETS

Animal Wellness Action and SHARK have prepared [an online folder](#) of assets for use by journalists, who are granted permission to publish them in connection with this press releases or related stories about cockfighting in Oklahoma provided credit is given.

Material includes:

- Videos from cockfights in Oklahoma
- A survey of Oklahomans showing their antipathy toward cockfighting
- Background material on the Oklahoma Gamefowl Commission
- A report on the connection between cockfighting and Bird Flu

## ABOUT

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) whose mission is to help animals by promoting laws and regulations at federal, state and local levels that forbid cruelty to all animals. The group also works to enforce existing anti-cruelty and wildlife protection laws. Animal Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all. Twitter: @AWAction\_News

SHARK is a non-profit organization with supporters around the U.S. and beyond. SHARK receives no government funding and completely relies on donations and grants to work on issues ranging in scope from local to worldwide. With a small core of volunteers, and a staff of five, SHARK battles tirelessly against rodeos, bullfighting, pigeon shoots, turkey shoots, canned hunts and more. President Steve Hindi has an open invitation to debate "the opposition." Because of his domination of past debates with animal abusers, however, it has been years since the opposition has taken him on.

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