animal wellness action

INVESTIGATIVE SPECIAL REPORT

COCK FIGHTING IN NEW MEXICO
OVERVIEW

Cockfighting Cruelty in New Mexico

The Land of Enchantment Is Still Peppered with Gamecock Farms, Animal Fighters, and a Brisk Trade of Fighting Animals to Mexico

It was a major moment in the national effort to eliminate animal fighting in the United States when in June 2007 then Governor Bill Richardson signed legislation to make New Mexico the 49th state to outlaw cockfighting. The president of the United Gamefowl Breeders Association, Ronnie Barron and other New Mexico-based cockfighters had fought off statewide anti-cockfighting legislation for years, even as nine counties had banned the practice. Also in 2007, Congress made it a felony to traffic in fighting birds or implements, and that same year, Louisiana would become the 50th state to outlaw the practice (albeit with a one-year delay in implementation of the ban), leaving just the U.S. territories as the only hold-outs as quasi-legal venues for staged animal fighting in the U.S.

After the state law went into effect in June 2007, Tommy Booth, who operated one of the best-known cockfighting pits in New Mexico, said he'd shutter Tommy's Club near Hobbs. He promised though that he would move his business over to border towns in Mexico, such as Ojinaga and Palomas. While some other cockfighters gave up the sport and complied with the law, perhaps not wanting to risk a felony offense under state or federal law, other enthusiasts persisted and went underground.

Indeed, according to a new report by Animal Wellness Action (AWA) and the Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF), cockfighting remains ever-present in New Mexico. There is a brisk trade in fighting animals, with staged battles occurring in the state; importing of birds into New Mexico from noted cockfighters, especially from major players in Alabama; and movement of fighting birds from New Mexico to other states and to Mexico and other nations. The cockfighting trade is still present in New Mexico and thousands of birds in the state are conscripted into deadly fights, where the animals are placed in pits, have razor sharp knives or gaffs strapped to their legs, and then fight to the death for human amusement and gambling.

There are occasional arrests of fighting enthusiasts caught in the act, including a bust in March 2020 in Chaves County where a large cockfighting ring near Roswell netted 80 attendees, with a fighting pits, roosters, and fighting pit implements making it plain what was going on.

But most cockfighters continue to operate without consequence. The biggest – and similarly illegal practice -- involves the breeding, training, and illegal trafficking of fighting animals. The report exposes multiple gamefarms in New Mexico where cockfighters raise and spar roosters destined for fighting pits near and far. The offspring of roosters who win major derbies are the ones coveted by other cockfighters, who can win cash prizes and trophies if their birds prevail in derbies, such as the World Slasher Cup in the Philippines or one of the numerous major competitions in Mexico. Offspring of birds who win derbies can sell for $2,000 per bird, with some major fighting operations selling thousands of birds a year.

AWA and AWF have found major cockfighting enthusiasts in the state doing business with Brent and Tyler Easterling of Alabama. In July, the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama unsealed a Motion for a Temporary Restraining Orders for Brent, Billy, Tyler, and William Easterling. Authorities searched the property in June and have ordered the Easterlings not to move animals from their property. The United States has identified fighting pits located near the Easterlings' two gamefowl farms.

Since 2002, it has been illegal to transport birds from any state to any other jurisdiction in the U.S. or abroad. In 2007, as mentioned above, New Mexico made cockfighting a felony, and the United States made animal fighting and associated activities felony offenses. The federal animal fighting law has subsequently been strengthened three more times (in 2008, 2014, and 2018).
Under federal law, the following acts are crimes:

- Knowingly sponsoring or exhibiting in an animal fighting venture;
- Knowingly attending an animal fighting venture, or knowingly causing an individual who has not attained the age of 16 to attend an animal fighting venture;
- Knowingly buying, selling, possessing, training, transporting, delivering or receiving any animal for the purposes of having the animal participate in an animal fighting venture;
- Knowingly using the mail service of the U.S. Postal Service, or any “written, wire, radio televisions or other form of communications in, or using a facility of, interstate commerce,” to advertise an animal for use in an animal fighting venture, or to advertise a knife, gaff, or other sharp instrument designed to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an animal fighting venture, or to promote or in any other manner further an animal fighting venture except as performed outside the U.S.;
- Knowingly selling, buying, transporting, or delivering in interstate or foreign commerce “a knife, a gaff, or any other sharp instrument” designed or intended to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an animal fighting venture.

Penalties for each violation of any one of these provisions allows for a maximum of five years in prison and a $250,000 fine for perpetrators, except for an adult attending an animal fighting venture. Penalties for adult attendance are one year in prison and a $5,000 fine. An “animal fighting venture” involves “a fight conducted or to be conducted between at least 2 animals for purposes of sport, wagering, or entertainment, except that the term animal fighting venture shall not be deemed to include any activity the primary purpose of which involves the use of one or more animals in hunting another animal.”

New Mexicans Involved in the Cockfighting Industry

We have reason to believe that the individuals named in this report are engaged in prohibited activities. We examined satellite images of their gamefarms, and captured social media posts, images and videos. We have received tips from New Mexicans who have stumbled across cockfighting operations or watched their neighbors engage in this blood sport. This table identifies gamefarms throughout New Mexico and summaries of their activity follow the table.

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John Jr. Gurule aka Reck Barberian and John Sr. Gurule  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

John Jr. and his dad, John Sr. Gurule, are doing business with Tyler and Brent Easterling to grow their gamefarm in Albuquerque. The Easterlings, based in central Alabama, are well-known cockfighters and traffickers. Tyler Easterling is a major national player in the industry and runs Swift Creek Gamefarm. Mr. Easterling has been mentoring John Gurule, Jr. (aka Reck Barberian) and has shipped fighting birds to New Mexico for fights there and apparently in Mexico.

This mentoring is described in detail in an interview of both Tyler and Reck, by Jim Collins from “Journey to the Pit” who introduced the two of them and started this mentoring program whereby expert cockfighters can teach new up and comers how to raise and train roosters to fight. (Interview: https://lnns.co/WJ-ceyo1IgO).

Reck and John Sr. are receiving birds via the U.S. Postal Service from Tyler Easterling and then breeding, training and fighting those birds in derbies.

In screen shots of Reck's Facebook posts below, Swift Creek Farm (owned by Tyler Easterling) congratulates Reck for doing his best in a fight at a derby. Reck's response, “…thank you for putting them in our hands we hope to make you proud.”

In additional pictures and videos on his Facebook page, Reck describes winning and losing fights on behalf of their “team” and thanks Easterling and Swift Creek Farm.

Also on his Facebook page, there is a video of Reck receiving a shipment of birds from Tyler Easterling – he videos the entire receipt of the crate and even describes the tags on the birds as coming from Easterling. Shipping birds through USPS for the purpose of cockfighting is illegal: Video: https://www.facebook.com/100006369005387/videos/2419057058316571/

This electronic record provides evidence that Tyler Easterling knowingly sells and ships birds for the purpose of cockfighting through the USPS, while John Jr. Gurule aka Reck Barberian is receiving, breeding and training birds for the purpose of cockfighting. The latter act is also a felony offense.

Facebook page for Reck and his father John: https://www.facebook.com/reck.barberian  
https://www.facebook.com/john.gurule.33
In these screen shots, Tyler Easterling of Swift Creek Farm in Alabama congratulates Reck for his participation in a derby. Reck's responses indicate he fights with birds that he gets from Tyler.
John Jr. Gurule aka Reck Barberian and John Sr. Gurule

(continued)

Reck's property

Reck's plans to participate in the Intercontinental Mega Derby
Reck and Swift Creek farms are still partners:

Reck expressed an interest in moving to Alabama (where Swift Creek is located) and Michael Dodds replies that he should move to Morgan or Lawrence County since it's close to any show he'd want to go to. A “show” is a cockfight.
Bragging about participating in cockfights:

John Jr. Gurule aka Reck Barberian and John Sr. Gurule (continued)
On his Facebook page he shares pictures and videos of cockfighting, upcoming derbies, and the shipping of roosters via USPS from his farm to other states as well as his price list. He breeds several bloodlines, including roosters from Brent Easterling – a well-known cockfighter and breeder who is included in our Alabama report. (https://www.facebook.com/SierraBrothersGamefarmPage)

Satellite photo of his property:
This is a cockfight derby he's sharing:

Shipping roosters across state lines:
A rooster that’s done with the derbies for the season:

Shipping through USPS:
Gustavo Sierra
(continued)

Doing business with Brent Easterling – a well-known cockfighter and breeder in Alabama:
Mario Maldonado, APV Gun Club Gamefarm, Albuquerque, New Mexico address unknown

Mr. Maldonado runs a breeding operation and is a cockfighter. On Facebook, he and his wife describe fighting in Mexico and can be seen often with well-known cockfighter, Brent Easterling, as well as Jim Collins, founder of the “Journey To The Pit” podcast.

This is an interview Mario did with Jim Collins on the Journey to the Pit Podcast in 2020, https://anchor.fm/jim-collins/episodes/Mario-Maldonado-ef0eda (there are at least two other podcasts featuring Mario). He describes being on the Gator Gamefarm making selections for the next years fights. (Jason Daniels owns Gator Gamefarm). Jim Collins says to Mario, “You’ve been successful for many seasons.” And they talk about how Mario selects roosters that will win.

Mr. Maldonado appears on the cover of Purebred Warrior, a cockfighting magazine: https://purebredwarrior.com/pw-journal-issue-05-mario-maldonado/
“Other than my family, my only passion is this great sport of cockfighting!” he observes in the narrative.

This is a video of the gamefarm on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sigYMcuHw2Y

Mario's Facebook page describes cockfighting, breeding, and training roosters: https://www.facebook.com/mario.maldonado.921/about
This is an interview Mario did with Jim Collins on the Journey to the Pit Podcast in 2020, [https://anchor.fm/jim-collins70/episodes/Mario-Maldonado-ef0eda](https://anchor.fm/jim-collins70/episodes/Mario-Maldonado-ef0eda) (there are at least two other podcasts featuring Mario). He describes being on the Gator Gamefarm making selections for the next year’s fights. (Jason Daniels owns Gator Gamefarm). Jim Collins says to Mario, “You've been successful for many seasons.” And they talk about how Mario selects roosters that will win.

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Mario’s Facebook page describes cockfighting, breeding, and training roosters: [https://www.facebook.com/mario.maldonado.921/about](https://www.facebook.com/mario.maldonado.921/about) “Other than my family, my only passion is this great sport of cockfighting!” he observes in the narrative.
Mario Maldonado
(continued)
Fidel White Sr and Jr run a gamefarm called “Somebody GameFarm”
14303 N Thorp St., Hobbs, NM 88242-0671
575.605.1939

By “shows” they mean fights at derbies:
Interviews in Revista Gallo Club Magazine, a cockfighting magazine in Mexico and Purebred Warrior – both in 2019

Fidel White Sr and Jr
(continued)
Facebook page has videos of roosters fighting on their property:
https://www.facebook.com/Feather-Serpent-Gamefowl-roswell-nm-1262014500563788

There have been complaints by neighbors filed against them as recent as 2019. There are more than 200 roosters here, maybe more by now.

Paul and Suzanne Payne
711 Avenue A, Melrose, NM 88124

There have been complaints by neighbors filed against them as recent as 2019. There are more than 200 roosters here, maybe more by now.
It's not clear if Mr. Lantz is still involved in cockfighting. But there are indicators of possible involvement. Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Konocti-Game-Farm-1020563501291006/
He apparently conducts his business over the phone, with his Facebook page showing his son's efforts to help him advertise. 575.734.0114
Ron Lantz
(continued)

Konocit Game Farm
June 25, 2017

1 yr pairs & trios available.
A few fresh 2 yr cocks. ($150 ea)
1 yr pure Asil ($500 ea)

All fowl are Ron Lantz’s own line and are proven quality lines.

Must call 575-734-0114. (Ron does not respond to facebook, email, or other electronic sources.)

Konocit Game Farm
September 21, 2016

Game Fowl Condition Vision 20-20 (October-November starts precondition), pictured is trophies in one season when cock fighting was legal using my show fowl conditioning method! Now offering my book for sale with limited sales in past three years. Also includes some personal phone coaching. 5757340114