Widespread Deception on Guam Import Documents

*AWA investigation shows fowl importers attempt to deceive authorities with claims that birds are for breeding, not fighting*

Federal Anti-Fighting Law Upheld as Constitutional

On December 20th, a federal law took effect that closed some loopholes in the Animal Welfare Act, forbidding animal fighting in every part of the United States, including Guam. That fortification of the law against dogfighting and cockfighting was built on a broad set of long-standing prohibitions. Since 2002, it’s been a crime – and a felony offense since 2007 – to transport fighting animals between the states or to the territories.

A Clear Public Mandate

Cockfighting is not an industry Guamanians support. A poll conducted by Market Research & Development on Guam determined that 62 percent of Guamanians favor the federal ban on cockfighting.

A Comprehensive Investigation

An AWA investigation – which included examination of industry sources, public media, and satellite imagery of shippers’ farms — makes it clear that dozens of shippers knowingly violated the federal law, in collaboration with the importers on Guam.

After sorting through nearly 2,500 pages of shipping records formally obtained from Guam’s Department of Agriculture, AWA found that cockfighters from the U.S. mainland made more than 500 illegal transports of fighting birds to customers on Guam. The records reveal the illegal trafficking of over 8,800 male birds to Guam in a 33-month period – an illegal shipment, on average, every other day.

A Widespread Deception

Import documents typically mischaracterized the shipped birds as “brood fowl” or “show fowl” rather than fighting birds in order to try to skirt the federal animal fighting law.

On Guam, there is no commercial poultry industry to speak of, and no competitions for show birds of any consequence on the island. Guam has, on the other hand, cultivated a robust cockfighting industry. These importers are paying hundreds for every rooster, and there’s just no other reason to make these kinds of payments unless you are deep in the industry. It doesn’t take great powers of deduction to figure this one out.

In addition, some shippers are sending more than 100 cocks for every hen, and in nearly every case, the ratios are extraordinarily lopsided to favor the males. In a standard agricultural operation receiving birds for production, the ratios would be inverted, with more females used for breeding and egg production.
A Disregard For The Law

Based on the results of the investigation, we believe the people on both ends of these transactions are committing felony offenses. We found that cockfighters were using the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) for the transports, even though the Animal Welfare Act specifically prohibits this illegal use of the mail service.

Here’s the bottom line: federal law bans cockfighting. The courts have upheld the federal exercise of authority as constitutional. Elected and appointed officials should respect the law and see that it’s enforced. It’s no more complicated than that.