



## Man found guilty of animal cruelty

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A Suffolk man was found guilty Tuesday of three counts of animal cruelty.

William Lee Shelton was sentenced to 30 days in jail, suspended on condition of two years of good behavior. He also was fined \$750.

Suffolk Animal Control officers were called to Shelton's Buckhorn Drive farm on Dec. 26, 2007, after receiving an anonymous tip. Upon arriving, they found that five cows out of more than 60 in the pasture were dead, and the remainder of the cows were emaciated. In addition, two cows were lying on the ground, unable to get up, and were euthanized by a local veterinarian, and a calf fell to the ground in front of animal control officers, who shot the calf in the head on the advice of the veterinarian on site.

Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Susan Walton brought two expert witnesses, one who was at the farm that day and another who performed autopsies on two of the cattle.

Daniel Kovich, a veterinary doctor who visited the farm that day, said that the entire herd showed signs of malnourishment.

"The calves were all very uniformly thin," he said. "They were malnourished."

Kovich also noted that the cows appeared to be dehydrated, and that the grass available in the pasture was not enough for the herd to eat because it was too short for them to bite off.

Suffolk Animal Control officer Meghann McGillvray-Chapin testified that when she arrived at the farm, the only source of food she saw was some hay that was mixed with cattle and horse feces.

A second veterinarian, Karl Magura, who performed the autopsies on a cow and a calf, said he made the decision that they died of malnutrition based on extremely low body fat, low muscle mass and lack of food in their stomachs. The cow was pregnant with a 30-pound full-term calf, which Magura said is extremely light for a full-term calf.

In addition, Magura said the amount of fat in the cow's bone marrow was 1.4 percent. Average emaciated cows have a bone marrow fat content of 60 percent.

"That cow's bone marrow fat is the lowest that I have ever seen," he said.

The defense brought half a dozen of Shelton's neighbors and friends to say that they had seen plenty of hay in the field in the months leading up to the Dec. 26 visit by animal control. One of them even said he sometimes put hay out there himself when Shelton's employees were unable to do so.

Justin Bush, Shelton's defense attorney, attempted to pin the blame for the condition of the animals on a disease, possibly magnesium deficiency. He brought a veterinarian to testify that magnesium deficiency could cause starvation in cattle.

However, Walton disagreed, saying that even if the cows had some sort of disease, Shelton still should have called a veterinarian. She produced veterinarians' records to show that none had been called during the fall and winter of last year.

"He still is required to provide these animals with the proper veterinary care that they deserve," she said. "To do something like this is strictly evil."

Judge W. Richard Savage III dismissed five of the charges because no tests had been performed on those animals, leaving reasonable doubt of the cause of their death. However, he found Shelton guilty of the other three counts of animal cruelty, sentencing him to 10 days and \$250 for each count. Shelton also was ordered to pay restitution for veterinarians' services, autopsy bills and the bill for the towing company that took the cows to Ivor to be autopsied.

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