

**LOCATION:** Odenton, Maryland

**ANIMALS HELPED:** 95 roosters, 91 hens, 84 chicks, four ducks and one dog

**WHEN CRYSTAL DOWD**, an Anne Arundel County animal control officer, began investigating a tip about a cockfighting operation, she knew her office needed help. It was their first cockfighting case, and it was a daunting number of animals. Officers believed the suspect was breeding roosters to sell in the Philippines and fighting them here in states with weak laws.

Dowd called The HSUS for help. Authorities descended on the property one morning in early June, along with HSUS staff members and a veterinarian. The suspect, a registered sex offender, lived on the property with his two children. “Conditions were deplorable,” says Janette Reever, HSUS deputy manager of animal fighting response.

Throughout the trash-filled yard, roosters lived in tiny cages or tethered out in the open. Most of the hens and baby chicks were crammed in one large enclosure. A matted Great Pyrenees dog sat chained between two chicken cages, while several hens and ducks ran around loose, pecking at a deer carcass. But the smell of the deer’s rotting flesh was imperceptible against the stench of a large blue barrel half-full of dead chickens.

Reever and the county’s lead investigator documented fighting paraphernalia such as knives, gaffs and medications. The roosters’ missing wattles, earlobes and combs provided more evidence. These fleshy parts bleed profusely when slashed in a fight, says Reever, so cockfighters cut them off without anesthesia. “It’s extremely painful for the birds.”

The veterinarian examined the animals, and they were taken to a temporary shelter. The ducks and Great Pyrenees were later adopted, but testing by the U.S. Department of Agriculture revealed that the chickens had untreatable, highly contagious diseases. All had to be euthanized, but the chickens did not die in vain: The breeding operation is closed, and a judge set the suspect’s bail at \$1.5 million—the highest Reever has seen in a cockfighting case. He also faces 89 felony animal cruelty charges, each carrying the possibility of a \$5,000 fine, three years in prison, or both.

Nor did the birds die without knowing kindness. As rescuers scooped them up, they nestled into their bodies. “I’d put them up by my heart,” Reever says, “and just hold them and let them feel my heart beat.”



**John Goodwin, HSUS director of animal cruelty policy, offers a gentle touch to one of the roosters.**

## TIP LINE IN COSTA RICA SAVES LIVES

**THE ANONYMOUS CALL** came into the tip line at midnight.

A dogfight was in progress in Alajuela, a province near Costa Rica’s capital. When authorities arrived, they found four dogs covered in scars and bite marks, one in such severe condition that she showed no signs of life.

After Costa Rica banned dogfighting in 2014, Costa Rica’s National Animal Health Service and Ministry of Agriculture—in partnership with Humane Society International-Latin America—opened a dedicated tip line for dogfighting complaints.

The tip line, operated with support from American Stafford Costa Rica, allows callers to report any animal fighting activities. Informants can send photos, videos and messages through the tip line, and they may receive a reward if the information is true and leads to a rescue.

So far, hundreds of dogs have been saved as a result of the tip line.

At the property in Alajuela, the dogs lived in terrible conditions, with no food, water or shelter. “They were infested with fleas and ticks and lots of flies,” says Amanda Chaves, companion animal coordinator for HSI-Latin America.

Rescuers transported the dogs to a nearby veterinary clinic for emergency care. Though all showed immediate improvement, three died of complications from ehrlichiosis, a tick-borne bacterial illness. The fourth dog is being rehabilitated for adoption.

The HSUS operates similar tip lines and reward programs in the U.S. for information about illegal puppy mills and animal fighting operations.

**+ LEARN MORE** about U.S. tip lines and reward programs at [humane society.org/rewards](https://www.humanesociety.org/rewards).