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New Investigation Exposes Widespread Cruelty at 99 Ranch Market Stores Across Six States

Investigation reveals systematic animal suffering in live seafood departments of major supermarket chain; expert veterinarian calls conditions "fundamentally incompatible" with basic animal welfare standards

Buena Park, CA — June 29, 2026 — A new investigation released today by Animal Outlook reveals widespread animal cruelty and neglect at 99 Ranch Market stores across six states, documenting severe overcrowding, untreated injuries and disease, inhumane slaughter practices, and dead and dying animals left in tanks with live animals.

99 Ranch Market operates 54 stores across 10 states, serving millions of shoppers annually. Following a detailed tip about disturbing conditions in the chain's live seafood departments, investigators looked into multiple locations in six different states. What they found was not isolated to one poorly managed store but was universal and systematic across every location visited.

"The cruelty we documented wasn't rare or exceptional—appalling conditions were observed and documented during each unique trip to each store," says Ben Williamson, Executive Director of Animal Outlook. "This investigation reveals that the suffering of aquatic animals at 99 Ranch Market is built into their business model, not the result of a few bad actors."

The investigation documented:

- **Severe overcrowding:** Tanks packed so densely that animals had virtually no room to move, making it impossible to properly monitor their wellbeing.
- **Untreated injuries and disease:** Fish, including catfish and bass, with significant tissue loss on their faces; swollen, raw mouths; open sores on their bodies; and cloudy, damaged eyes.
- **Dead and dying animals:** Tilapia floating upside down or lying motionless on their sides in tanks with live animals.
- **Brutal slaughter methods:** Workers bludgeoning fish to death, typically requiring multiple blows to incapacitate the animals. Fish were cut open while their hearts were still visibly beating.
- **Suffocation:** Live crabs thrown into plastic bags and left to slowly suffocate.

Expert Veterinary Analysis

Dr. Jena Questen, a board-certified aquatic veterinarian and former president of the World Aquatic Veterinary Medical Association, reviewed footage from the investigation and provided expert analysis.

"Fish and other aquatic animals are often mistakenly treated as if they are less sensitive than other animals, but scientifically, we know they experience pain, stress, and suffering," said Dr. Questen. "The kinds of conditions documented—overcrowding, visible injuries, dead and dying animals in tanks—are simply incompatible with even basic standards of animal welfare."

Authorities Failed to Act

Investigators reported findings to relevant authorities in multiple jurisdictions. Agencies either failed to substantiate the complaints or proposed only modest, cosmetic changes that would do little to prevent ongoing suffering.

"This failure of enforcement highlights a fundamental problem: aquatic animals receive minimal legal protection, and when oversight is weak or absent, companies face little accountability for the suffering they cause," continues Williamson.

Call to Action

Animal Outlook is calling on 99 Ranch Market to immediately commit to ending all live aquatic animal sales across its stores and urges legislators to support bans on live animal markets.

"Animal markets cannot be reformed," says Williamson. "When cruelty is this systematic, when oversight is this inadequate, and when animal suffering is this predictable, the only ethical response is to shut them down."

For investigative footage, please visit: animaloutlook.org/investigations/99-ranch-market

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Animal Outlook is a nonprofit animal protection organization working to end the abuse of farmed animals through undercover investigations, litigation, corporate outreach, public education, and other advocacy programs. <http://animaloutlook.org>