

Oklahoma continues to be a major source of roosters bred for fighting purposes despite state and federal laws that prohibit the practice, national animal rights groups claimed Tuesday.

Public shipping records examined by the rights groups show Oklahoma to be the top exporter to Guam of chickens bred for fighting, which is illegal in the United States and its territories. The groups called on local district attorneys and the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Oklahoma to enforce state and federal anti-cockfighting statutes.

“As the evidence provided herein shows, the Eastern District is fraught with individuals who have been involved in global trafficking and fighting of birds,” said Drew Edmondson, former Oklahoma attorney general and current co-chairman of the National Law Enforcement Council of Oklahoma, an arm of Animal Wellness Action and the Animal Wellness Foundation, which led the investigation. Chris Wilson, First Assistant U.S. Attorney in U.S. Attorney Brian Kuester’s office, declined to comment on the request by the groups, saying the office has not had an opportunity to review and discuss the allegations. Edmondson said investigations by Animal Wellness Action and the Animal Wellness Foundation identified three Oklahoma operators, claimed by the groups to be involved in illegal cockfighting activities. The three operators were among 71 exporters across the U.S. whose shipping documents were obtained by the groups from the Guam Department of Agriculture. Guam shipping records show that three of the top five U.S. exporters of fowl to Guam were located in the U.S. District for the Eastern District of Oklahoma. The operators targeted by the AWA and AWF are located in Heavener, Stigler and Tahlequah. The “overarching conclusion” from the review of some 2,500 public shipping records dating back to November 2016 was that Oklahoma was the No. 1 state in the U.S. in the shipping of fowl to Guam, said Wayne Pacelle, AWA founder. President Donald Trump in December 2018 signed the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, which established a federal ban on all animal fighting in the U.S. territories, effective last December. Oklahoma was one of the last states to outlaw cockfighting when voters in 2002 outlawed the practice. Public documents examined by the AWA and AWF

found that the three operators sent many shipments amounting to hundreds of birds to Guam that were claimed to be "brood fowl," Edmondson said. But the ratio of roosters to hens in the shipments were 10-to-1 or 100-to-1 in some instances, Edmondson said. Roosters are used in cockfighting. "That indicates that it is not brood stock at all," Edmondson said. "It is intended for the fighting rings of Guam" a violation of state and federal law. Edmondson said the U.S. attorney, should he choose to investigate any violations of federal law linked to the allegations, would likely use U.S. Postal Service investigators since the fowl were likely sent via regular mail. Federal law specifically prohibits the use of USPS to promote, or in any other manner further, an animal fighting venture, Edmondson wrote in a letter to Keuster. Featured video

Curtis Killman 918-581-8471 curtis.killman@tulsaworld.com Twitter: @loucardfan61 Be the first to know Get local news delivered to your inbox! Sign up! * I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy.