

INSPECTOR NOTE

Building: HILDENBRAND WINE AND OLIVE ESTATE

Street: BLOUVLEI ROAD

Suburb: WELLINGTON

Postal Code: 7655

Date: 2025-08-29

Time: 10:47

Inspector: ELANI GRAHAM

Type: CASE DISCUSSION NOTE

Follow-Up Date:

Comments:

Good afternoon,

I am writing to find out whether you require any further statements from any people who were in direct contact with the animals kept on Reni Hildenbrands farm. It has come to my attention that your officers were at her farm last Friday and have already confiscated some of her animals. I have not laid any complaint as yet because one of my friends resides there and I did not want to cause any trouble for her while she was looking for alternative accommodation. She given notice now so I would like to think that it is safe to report what I witnessed. I would also hope that this would assist in removing the animals that have been left behind.

In the first week of January this year I moved in to the cottage located near the guinea pigs and rabbit wendy house. I was given the cottage and a small stipend in lieu of looking after the animals on her farm. She is planning a trip to Tunisia at the end of June for 10 days, and also said she requires an assistant for other farm related activities, and hired me to oversee things in her absence.

I only spent 2 weeks working with her which proved very difficult and traumatic because she is not any easy person to deal with and does not listen to suggestions regarding the animals wellbeing. I started there around 13 January 2025 and she and I came to a mutual agreement on 27 January 2025 that we would not be able to work together. After that I didn't have much contact with the animals except for the horses and donkeys until I moved at the end of March 2025.

During my time there I would make rounds with her every morning at 6am to unlock all of the animals, and again in the early evening. During the day I was learning about the routine activities related to the farm. She locks the chickens, ducks, turkeys up in separate coops with padlocks every night after sunset and opens up again on sunrise. The area that these birds are locked in is quite small. They do get food and water and bird seed only.

I took note that the silkies did not look like they were in a very good condition, Reni said its because of their advanced age. They had badly overgrown skin on their claws, which apparently is from chicken lice and not keeping their coops clean. Myself and one of her staff found one silky that could no longer stand on its own, and we clipped it's claws to try to help it stand but it kept falling over. When I reported it to Reni she fetched karbadust from the kitchen and told us to dust the birds on the shoulder blades. That particular chicken was found dead the next morning.

The rabbits and guinea pigs were also locked away every night. The other tenant on the property tried to separate the male and female guinea pigs, after we sexed them all the boys were put on the ground of the Wendy house, and the females were in separate cages. This was in order to prevent more breeding and inbreeding. We tried also to tell her that they required roughage in their diet, not only pellets. She is very stubborn when it comes to making any suggestions to improve the quality of life for any of her animals. I also found that the rabbits were giving birth on the bare floor and not creating a nest, maybe due to overcrowding or illness. Once the babies were born, something was then eating the day old rabbits ears and feet. I thought it may even be the male guinea pigs but I wasn't sure. We set rat traps as well because I had seen 2 rats in one of the Wendy houses one evening when it was dark already and we were locking up. Reni did not make any plans to take the injured baby rabbits to be euthanased, she believes that the animals must die naturally and would not listen to any other suggestions. She put them in a box together without their mother in the wendy house, because we had no way of knowing who the mother was either. It took 2 to 3 days for them to die. Some of the rabbits got sick, and when I reported that she said yes she knows something is wrong. When I looked online I found that the symptoms were like something called myxomatosis. Gunk on the eyes, mucous blocking their noses, difficulty breathing and lethargic. Some rabbits, especially babies had lumps in

their bodies/stomach area. Daily we would find dead rabbits, which we would have to put under the towel on the table and then she would have her labourers bury them. She also failed to keep the males and females separately to avoid further litters being born even though there were so many. Some of the birds in the Wendy house were also sick looking, losing feathers and generally lethargic. Also reported but nothing done about it. When we tried to talk her into putting straw down for bedding and roughage she complained all the time the animals were wasting it. I think that has been stopped completely. The lady taking care of the horses rehomed over 100 guinea pigs until Reni put a stop to it. We would find a male stuck in the female cage when we sexed them every few weeks, and of course more pregnant mummies because of this.

There were 5 adult goats and 2 baby goats when I was there. At night they get locked in a wooden Wendy house with some water and a small bucket of pellets. In the morning she unlocks the door and gives them more pellets, which half fall through the wooden floor onto the ground underneath the Wendy house, which is raised off the ground. The paddock that the goats are in has no grazing in at all, even the trees in this paddock don't have any foliage because the goats have eaten everything that is the same height as them off the trees. Only after the lady that looks after the horses insisted, Reni agreed to start giving them all some straw and some lucerne, but shared with the 4 sheep that get turned out with them during the day. When I suggested she allow them to graze elsewhere on the property she refused. There is so much grazing down the bottom side of the farm, even in the summer months when it's dry. The old sheep are locked in a section next to the stables at night and let out again in the morning to the goat paddock. They all look very old and sometimes even struggle to get up and stand in the morning because of their age. They share the little bit of roughage that the goats also get. If animals get that old and arthritic we as their custodians have to make the difficult choice to have them out to sleep. When the subject was broached Reni refused, saying they will die naturally.

She has a crow called Wimpie, in quite a small cage. The only thing I noticed was that his perching stick was too close to the cage roof so all his feathers on his head were rubbed off. I did ask to move the perch down but was told that I can't interfere.

There is a lady taking care of her horses and donkeys at the moment. I first saw them in October last year, all of them had bad skin irritation and were quite underweight. I don't think there were experienced labourers taking care of them, or checking on their care before. This lady taking care of them now has given Reni's horses and donkeys supplements and other treatments out of her own pocket to get them healthy. One of the older horses Napoli had shoes on that had grown into his hooves because there was no regular visit from the farrier. I don't think the dentist came either because we would find balls of food left in their food buckets which meant they were having difficulty chewing and swallowing their roughage. Over time their trust was gained so cream could be applied to their itchy skin and with supplements in their food they got much better. Napoli passed away earlier this year, very bad death because Reni delayed calling the vet out until it was so late and they did everything to save him but I think he was too far gone by the time the vet came.

The donkeys were petrified of humans because they'd never been handled, so cleaning their feet was even a chore and they had to get used to being handled, and to build up trust with them. The lady taking care of them is leaving at the end of June so it's worrying that all her efforts will be reversed again and they'll go back to their awful condition as before. The pony mare has sweet itch and the vet instructed Reni that she has to wear a fly mask and fly sheet permanently. The sheet she had got torn but hasn't been replaced. So she scratches herself open on the stable door or on the paddock poles. At present there is no treatment for her so her condition is getting worse.

Then Reni's own dogs and cats:

She has a favourite which is her Bouvier Zamba, and she allows the chocolate Labrador Daisy (very overweight and found most days wandering on the Blouvillei road) and the big black cross breed Maggie, and her most recent rescue Tassie out. There are also only 5 or 6 cats that are allowed out to roam free. Apparently some of the dogs chase the cats. The other dogs are locked up in the house for long periods, apparently because she is scared they will wander. When she does let them out they run all over, especially Luna and Patches who go down to the vineyards. Too much pent up energy and no attention. I also think Luna and Patches were stolen from a previous tenant, because one of the labourers said something to me one day. I don't know which tenant, but that is apparently another reason why she keeps them locked up. Reni told me that these two dogs were abandoned by their owner. There are cats who never get let out of the room they live in. Sometimes if I walked past that room the shutters would be open and I'd see them lying on the window sill. The domestic lady cleans their cat boxes so she will be able to say more about their condition. I think in total there are 15 cats.

I don't know what condition they are in though because in that short time I was helping her I didn't have much contact with them.

She had a large pig called Fritz that has also been euthanased now. He had a very overgrown hoof which prevented him from moving around properly but she refused to get the hoof trimmed saying if we sedate

Controller Controller 2025-08-29 10:47

Captured By: