

✓ Horse *Animals Welfare* breeders sue SPCA

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SANTA CRUZ — A \$50 million lawsuit has been filed against the city, county and several animal welfare agencies by a Bonny Doon horse breeding family that was cleared of animal neglect charges in March.

The suit alleges that Mustafa, Elodie, Nezh and Semih Sabankaya suffered irreparable damage to their reputations as world-class breeders of Arabian horses.

"They've lost business," said their attorney, Mitchell Blumenthal of San Francisco, in a phone interview Wednesday. "Horses are not being sent to them for boarding or reproductive purposes. They are blocked from showing horses at various shows in the U.S."

Mustafa, Nezh and Semih Sabankaya were acquitted by a jury in March of misdemeanor animal neglect charges after a highly publicized trial.

State and local officers from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals seized 44 horses from the brothers ranch last October, claiming the animals were malnourished and mistreated.

"If they investigated, they would have known those horses were sent to them by a horse owner in Arizona so they could nurse them back to health," said Blumenthal.

The horses were returned to the Sabankayas after several months. According to the suit filed Tuesday in Santa Cruz County Superior Court, the local SPCA and other agencies falsified information to confiscate the horses.

It also claims that Nezh Sabankaya was falsely imprisoned when animal welfare officers arrested him on charges of obstructing an officer in the performance of his duty.

Named in the suit are the Santa Cruz County Animal Welfare Association and the city and county of Santa Cruz. In addition, the suit names as defendants the state, the Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley, Marin County Humane Society, Pegasus Veterinary Clinic, Dr. Scott Simms, Peninsula Humane Society and Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Monterey County.

The Sabankayas are seeking \$50 million in damages in addition to punitive damages.

Jody Paterniti, executive director of the Santa Cruz SPCA, declined to comment on the suit Wednesday, saying she had not yet seen it.

The state, city and county have rejected claims filed earlier by the Sabankayas.