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UC Law Summit Explores Impact and Implications of Historic Animal Rights Trial

The “Right to Rescue” is a hot topic after a California jury acquitted two activists who removed sick birds from a Foster Farms slaughter truck. Jurors, defendants, attorneys, and law professors gathered over the weekend to discuss the impacts of this verdict.



Three jurors from the Foster Farms Trial in Merced speak on a panel at UC Law San Francisco on Saturday, April 22, 2023.

UC Law Professor Hadar Aviram (left) facilitated the panel.

(Photo credit: Dean Wyrzykowski)

[PHOTOS/VIDEO](#)

APRIL 24, 2023, SAN FRANCISCO, CA - Over the weekend, UC Law San Francisco (formerly UC Hastings) hosted the Foster Farms Trial Summit, an event that featured defendants, witnesses, attorneys, and jurors from the recent trial of Alicia Santurio and “Baywatch” TV star Alexandra Paul. Last month, in one of two recent,

landmark victories for the animal rights movement, these two factory farm investigators were [acquitted of misdemeanor theft charges by a 12-person jury in Merced County](#).

The charges stemmed from a September 2021 [rescue](#) of two sick chickens from a transport truck that was heading into a Livingston slaughterhouse owned by Foster Farms, the largest poultry producer on the West Coast. Santurio and Paul are members of the international animal rights network [Direct Action Everywhere](#) (DxE), which is leading a campaign to establish the legal [“Right to Rescue”](#) animals from abuse.

Law professor and civil rights attorney Justin Marceau said the verdict, “represents an important, legal affirmation of the right to rescue farmed animals who are suffering, diseased, or otherwise in danger of an inhumane death.”

Last fall a Utah jury issued a groundbreaking [“not guilty”](#) verdict for two DxE investigators who rescued sick piglets from a Smithfield Foods factory farm. These two recent trials – along with upcoming trials for activists who openly rescued animals in Sonoma County – could add up to a series of courtroom debates that helps establish a new view of animals under the law.

Merced County Judge Paul Lo, who presided at the Foster Farms trial, thanked the jurors for their deliberation and [said](#), “This is not just about two chickens. It’s about very important principles.”

The UC Law summit included a legal workshop on [“open rescue”](#) (rescuing animals in critical condition with no attempt to conceal the rescuer’s identity); four panel discussions featuring the defendants, attorneys, jurors, and witnesses from the Foster Farms trial; and an interactive mock trial designed to further explore the evolving status of laws related to corporate animal abuse, animal rescue, and [animal personhood](#).

One juror [said](#), “The prosecution even bringing charges I think is infuriating and doesn’t make me feel good about our legal system... I did feel some hope and humanity in our juror system in the experience and the process and the decision that we arrived at.”

Further talks, trainings, and actions around the Right to Rescue campaign are set to take place during the [Animal Liberation Conference](#) at UC Berkeley this June. The annual conference brings together hundreds of dedicated animal rights activists from around the world to learn and take nonviolent, direct action together.

Investigators with [Direct Action Everywhere \(DxE\)](#) enter farms, slaughterhouses, and other facilities to document abuses, and to rescue sick and injured animals. DxE’s investigatory work has been featured in [The New York Times](#), [WIRED](#), and a [brutal mass pig killing exposé](#). DxE activists have been [subjected to FBI raids](#) and [felony prosecutions](#) for their investigative work. In 2022, DxE activists won the first [acquittal](#) in an open rescue case. DxE led the 2019 grassroots effort to [ban fur](#)

[products in California](#) and the 2021 effort to transition Berkeley city purchases to [100% plant based foods](#). Visit DxE on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and at [directactioneverywhere.com](#).

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