

Man Who Says He was Fired for Feeding Cats Files Lawsuit

Former Cornell University farmhand is suing for \$20 million.

A cat-loving former farmhand at a private, upstate New York university filed a \$20 million lawsuit against the Ivy League school for, he says, firing him because he refused to stop feeding a pack of feral felines on campus.

In his lawsuit, former Cornell University employee John Beck, who milked cows at the university's dairy barn, says he cared for about 20 cats at the 2,600-acre Animal Science Teaching and Research Center in upstate Harford while working a weekend graveyard shift for about nine months prior to his firing in August 2003.

At that time, Beck claims, he repeatedly disobeyed orders from a supervisor to stop feeding the cats. Beck, who also worked part-time at the farm for five years in the 1990s, says in his claim that all the farmhands fed the cats.

In a termination letter he received from the university's vice president for human resources, Beck was told on several occasions that feeding the cats was not consistent with the needs of the farm.

You were let go from your temporary position at the farm because, despite repeated instructions to the contrary, you continued the practice of feeding the feral cats, the letter stated.

The university filed a motion in the state Supreme Court in late May to throw out the lawsuit, according to Cornell spokesman Joseph Schwartz.

William Carr, an investigator with the Cortland County SPCA, which looked into the dispute at the research farm in 2003, said the university did bring some of the barn cats to the shelter for adoption and had others fixed at the university veterinary school.

But Beck contends that because the cats came to rely on the farm as a source for food, they deserved to be fed. Posted: June 3, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST