

Family: Deputies who killed rancher escalated altercation

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The family of an Idaho rancher who was shot and killed by sheriff's deputies after one of his bulls was hit by a car and charged emergency crews said his death was not justified.

Jack Yantis, 62, died a week ago after an altercation with two Adams County deputies along a highway just north of the tiny town of Council, Idaho State Police said. The deputies planned to shoot the injured animal when Yantis arrived with a rifle. All of them fired their weapons, investigators said.

Deputies are to blame for Yantis' death, family members said in statements provided to the Idaho Statesman (<http://bit.ly/1PwmzGK>) by attorneys hired after the Nov. 1 shooting. The newspaper also interviewed relatives who say they saw the shooting and received a video statement from Yantis' wife, who was also at the scene.

"Law enforcement should be trained to de-escalate situations," said Rowdy Paradis, a nephew of the Yantis' who says he was a witness. "In this case, I stood 10 feet away and watched two deputies escalate the situation and needlessly kill a man."

Idaho State Police declined to comment to The Associated Press. Sheriff Ryan Zollman did not return a request for comment.

"We are committed to doing a meticulous investigation and that's why we can't comment," Idaho State Police spokeswoman Teresa Baker said.

Dispatchers had called Yantis while he was at dinner, telling him to take care of his 2,500-pound Gelbvieh bull after the crash, his family said. In the state's rural areas, it is common for vehicles to strike livestock, and Yantis had put down animals before, according to relatives.

Yantis rode to the scene on an all-terrain vehicle, and his wife, Donna, picked up the family's .204-caliber rifle and met him on the highway.

Paradis said Yantis asked him to bring a small front-end loader to transport the animal once they were finished. The family says the deputies had shot the bull before Yantis arrived.

When he got there, his wife handed him the rifle and he aimed the gun at the animal lying on the pavement. The deputies stood behind him as he put the barrel a few feet from the bull's head with his finger on the trigger, his family said. Paradis said he did not see Yantis or the deputies speak.

That's when a deputy grabbed Yantis' shoulder from behind, turned him around and pushed the rancher. Relatives think the gun might have gone off accidentally and then the deputies opened fire. The family says Yantis was shot in the chest and abdomen.

"There was no shootout. It was a senseless murder," said Yantis' daughter, Sarah.

Donna Yantis said she and Paradis tried to run to the rancher but the deputies threw them to the ground.

"And then they threatened me and my nephew ... threw us on the middle of Highway 95, searched us and handcuffed us, and wouldn't let us go take care of Jack," she said in a video statement.

Donna Yantis had a heart attack at the scene and had to be flown to a local hospital, where she recorded video, the family said.

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