

Investigation at Natural Valley Farms Slaughter Plant Neudorf, Saskatchewan

1. General Information

Location:

Natural Valley Farms
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Mailing Address:

523 Garnet Street
Wolseley, Saskatchewan
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Plant Manager:

Mr. Cam Taylor

President /Livestock Manager:

Mr. Ken Pillar

Natural Valley Farms is a “producer-owned” business with a processing facility in Wolseley, SK and a slaughter plant in Neudorf, SK. The plant slaughters approximately 700 cattle and based on our observations approximately 1000 horses per week.

2. Observations:

9/26/07

During our first visit, we discovered one of what we later found out be three massive dead piles. This one held horse parts in varying stages of decomposition, as well as a number of horse heads. Entrails and internal organs were at the far end of one of the long chains of piles. Immediately beside the horse body parts pile were thousands of sun-bleached cattle skulls. The ground of the entire area was soft and clearly had been used as a dumping site for years. The carcasses were not covered with any soil or other substrate; they were just dumped in a pile.

Upon closer inspection, we noticed that the horse heads appeared to be without captive-bolt pistol or bullet holes, yet the heads had clearly been “processed” as though butchered for the meat.



10/2/07

We returned to the dead pile and again found among heads that clearly showed bullet wounds evidence of several heads with no captive bolt pistol or gun wounds.



10/2/07

From the dead pile, we went to the facility and requested a meeting with management. We were told they were in a meeting with a Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) veterinarian and we were to call and leave a message with our request.

We then observed the facility from the back where we could see a bucket truck being continually loaded with horse heads, limbs and entrails that it would then dump into a larger rendering crate. The crate was then picked up by a large tractor and brought to the dead pile every couple of hours. At this time, we believe the plant is likely at its maximum of killing 200 horses per day. Cattle are also continuing to be killed at the plant.

At the back of the facility are two massive feedlots – one for cattle, one for horses (there were hundreds of each). The animals appeared to be provided with both feed and water.

We determined from observation that the plant closes at 5:30 pm.

We then returned to the dead pile to see if new horse heads had been added from the killing that afternoon.

When we returned the smell was overwhelming and the pile was steaming from the decaying process. No new heads were added to the pile though.

10/4/07

We returned to the slaughter plant at approximately noon to observe it prior to our meeting with the management.

We immediately noticed two Roberge trailers (with Saskatchewan plates) – both with double decks in the middle section – carrying horses. We observed the unloading of one of the trailers as approximately 40 horses ran out in what appeared to be one group. Given this, there were likely no dividers installed, but the horses would've only been loaded on one level then. We were able to observe the horses running back and forth, they were in acceptable condition.

We returned to the dead pile but were unable to inspect it as the gates were closed and locked today. New heads had been added but we were unable to see them from the gate.

We then met with the Plant Manager and the Animal Manager and learned the following:

- All horses come to the plant as “feeder” horses and must be checked by a veterinarian before shipping
- The horses are not mixed, they arrive in lots and are kept in lots until time of slaughter
- Ill animals are segregated in the feedlot and checked by a vet
- 5 CFIA inspectors observe unloading
- They are not linked to Velda (Belgian company), they are owned by producers in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba.
- Claimed that farmers bring the horses directly to the plant, not through auctions, but when questioned, it turned out he was talking about cattle.
- When pressed, Ken stated that **“likely in time, American horses will be brought here” (We believe it is likely that American horses are already brought here.)**
- Horses and cattle are led into the slaughter plant on horseback
- No electric prods are allowed
- No noise is allowed in the barn
- **They kill 5 days a week**
- **All animals are killed with a captive bolt pistol and all employees are trained in its use. ALL horses are killed in this manner.**

10/23/07

We received the following info regarding the history of the facility:

When the plant was only licensed to kill cattle Dr. Temple Grandin was called in to train the workers on proper use of captive bolt pistols as they were experiencing a too high revival rate. CFIA and Dr. Grandin drafted regulations and provided training until they were both satisfied that the rates at the plant were acceptable again (95% insensibility rate).

Given this history and Animals' Angels recent findings, CFIA requested an unannounced audit conducted by the Regional Veterinary Officer in Saskatchewan, the superior of the veterinarians located at the plant. The goal was to gather 2 horse heads and have them tested.

We were also informed that CFIA is already investigating the plant and postmortem examinations are being conducted in order to determine why so many horses were either arriving dead at the plant or dying in the feedlot.

11/8/07

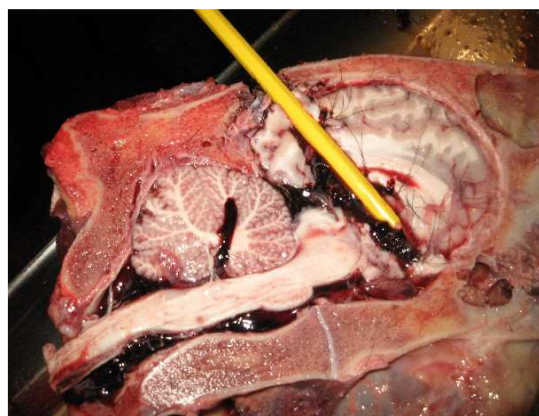
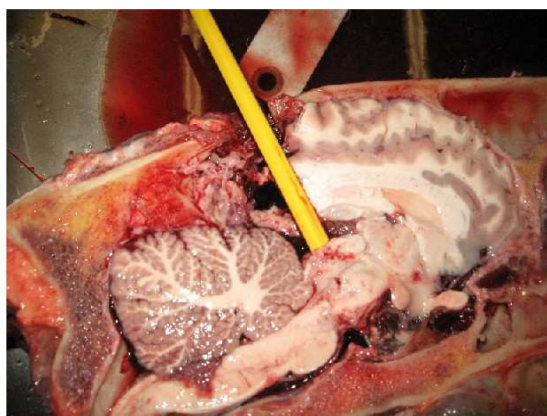
The Regional Veterinary Officer conducted the unannounced audit and found compliance with a 95% insensibility rate.

They tested two heads and confirmed that both horses had been rendered unconscious immediately. **These heads were not obtained from the dead pile but randomly selected during the slaughter process.** CFIA explained that this was necessary because the brain liquefies quickly post stunning and therefore has to be examined while still fresh.

To be absolutely certain, Animals' Angels sent photos to Dr. Temple Grandin who came to the following conclusion:

"These shots were slightly off target but they should be sufficient to induce instantaneous insensibility. The top of the brain stem is shattered. The horse should have been properly stunned with one shot"

However, this leaves unexplained why the heads on the dead pile showed no entry wounds. It is possible that these heads belonged to the horses that had arrived dead at the plant and had their heads examined post-mortem. But why would it be necessary to separate the heads for the body to conduct such an examination? Another possible explanation could be that because of the type of captive bolt used the bolt is so small that sometimes the skin seals over the hole and one would only know it was there by palpating the area.



Pencil showing bolt path and line of trajectory



11/16/07

Animals' Angels sent a letter out to the management expressing our concerns about the heads on the dead pile and requested an explanation for the missing bullet/captive bolt wounds. To date, we have not received an answer.

12/10/07

We shared our concerns about the environmental impact of the three large dead piles with the Saskatchewan government. We were informed that Natural Valley Farms has a permit for composting, because the soil in this area is full of clay and the ground water level is suitable. **However, all carcasses and organs have to be completely covered with a bulking agent, such as sawdust or straw. This is necessary to start the composting process and for microorganisms to degrade the carcass.** During this process, the temperature of the pile heats up and kills bacteria and viruses that might be present in the carcass. In addition, the cover keeps odor, flies and predators to a minimum.

Leaving the carcasses uncovered is a violation of composting guidelines and a possible danger to the environment.