



Horse Slaughter: America's Dirty Little Secret

Survey after survey shows that Americans consistently and overwhelmingly disapprove of horse slaughter for human consumption (recent polls from Kentucky, Texas and Utah respectively show that 82, 72 and 69 percent of those questioned oppose the practice). As more learn of horse slaughter, polls show that the percentage will rise.

Neither a “necessary evil” nor a “public service,” horse slaughter is foreign owned, operating for profit--at U.S. taxpayers' expense. The recent Federal Income Tax return of one Texas horse slaughter plant shows the plant paid only \$5 in federal taxes on \$12 million in sales (see enclosed).

The current patchwork of state laws on horse slaughter is inadequate. Prohibited by state laws in Texas and Illinois where the only domestic horse slaughter plants operated until last year, horse slaughter could simply resume in other states that have no such laws. Federal law prohibiting horse slaughter ensures that slaughterhouses don't simply relocate.

The failure to enact federal law prohibiting horse slaughter, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (AHSPA), has allowed for the export of American horses to Canada and Mexico, exacerbating the brutality of already cruel transport and slaughter practices.

Export of horses for slaughter abroad

Question: If there is a ban on horse slaughter in the U.S., will there be an increase in the export of horses for foreign slaughter?

Answer: The AHSPA contains clear provisions prohibiting the export of horses for slaughter abroad, as well as clear enforcement and penalty provisions. Risk of federal prosecution and the high costs associated with illegally transporting horses long distances for slaughter abroad are strong deterrents.

Question: Aren't the foreign-owned plants in the U.S. a better alternative than horse slaughter plants over the border?

Answer: Whether inside or outside U.S. borders the commercial slaughter of horses is not euthanasia but a brutal and terrifying death. Horses are flight animals and use of a captive bolt gun on the horse with its long muscular neck is imprecise and leads to injury and/or failure to render the horse unconscious. Many horses were conscious when they were shackled and hoisted by a rear leg to have their throats cut, as seen in undercover footage from inside the horse slaughter facilities in the U.S.

Horse slaughter advocates cite the AVMA 2000 Report on Euthanasia as support for their position that horse slaughter is “humane euthanasia”. But the

AVMA Report regarding horses was based on the Australian Veterinary Association Guidelines for Humane Slaughter and Euthanasia, and the conclusion that the captive bolt gun is an acceptable method of horse euthanasia is contrary to the opinion of the Australian Veterinary Association relied on by the AVMA.

The Australian Veterinary Association clearly states that “the captive bolt pistol is not satisfactory for horses since firm pressure to the forehead is essential for its effective use and this tends to be resisted by the horse.” This is especially true under slaughter plant conditions where hundreds of horses per day are slaughtered (see VEW whitepaper enclosed).

The fact is that the horse slaughter companies and the very trade associations who support horse slaughter, claiming it performs a ‘service’ that alleviates equine suffering, are the self-same groups working strenuously and disingenuously for the continued brutal export of tens of thousands of America's horses for slaughter in Mexico and Canada, by physically shipping horses to slaughter and/or by actively opposing the AHSPA.

There is no question, horse slaughter is **NOT** humane euthanasia but terrible suffering inflicted on the way to and during slaughter, whether inside or outside U.S. borders.

Humane Euthanasia

Question: But don't experts say horse slaughter is human euthanasia?

Answer: Euthanasia is a gentle painless death to prevent suffering and is intended to relieve pain. Horse slaughter inflicts pain and is in no way comparable to humane euthanasia. Horse slaughter is a death preceded by terror, pain, and suffering in which pregnant mares, foals, stallions, injured horses, and even blind horses, are transported in crowded double-decker cattle trucks without food, water, or rest. Upon arrival, their suffering intensifies many times over. It is the united opinion of VEW professionals that horse slaughter is inhumane and is not euthanasia (see VEW whitepaper enclosed). Recall (see preceding answer) that the Australian study which serves as the basis for the AVMA's report calling horse slaughter by captive bolt “humane,” took the opposite view.

Previous Congressional Vote on Horse Slaughter

Question: Didn't Congress already vote to stop horse slaughter when it passed the amendment to the 2006 Agriculture budget removing funding for required USDA inspections at the horse meat plants?

Answer: Yes, the intent of Congress was to stop horse slaughter with the passage of the Ensign Byrd Amendment, the Senate voting 68-29, the House voting 269-158 in favor. But Michael Johanns circumvented the legislation by instituting a "pay for inspections" program for the 3 horse slaughter plants. The program was ruled illegal in the lower court and appeals court. By the time it reached the Supreme Court, state laws in Texas and Illinois had already shut down domestic slaughter. The states acted but Federal law is required to effect a true national ban.

Neglect and abuse

Question: Will banning horse slaughter mean more cases of horse abuse and neglect?

Answer: No. Since closure of the domestic plants in early part 2007 there has been no rise in neglect and abuse cases. Both the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the Hooved Animal Humane Society (HAHS) reported that during the 2002-2004 closure of the only slaughter plant in the region, abuse cases actually decreased. Since California banned horse slaughter in 1998 there has been no rise in abuse and neglect and horse theft has dropped by over 84%.

Texas, which had the only two slaughter plants in 2003, had among the nation's highest rates of cruelty and theft. Data indicates that the existence and proximity of horse slaughter plants correspond to increased horse abuse and theft.

Horse slaughter, not its ban, means more cases of abuse and neglect. Horse slaughter incentivizes irresponsible breeding practices resulting in abuse and neglect. It provides a “dumping ground” for irresponsible breeders and a ‘throw away’ mentality generally.

Unwanted Horses

Question: If horses aren't slaughtered, where will all the unwanted horses go?

Answer: The fear tactic of unwanted horses is similar to the abandoned horses fear tactic, both used to

inflare and obfuscate the facts.

The fact is the annual number of horses slaughtered in the U.S. dropped from over 300,000 in the 1990s to less than 66,000 in 2004, with no special infrastructure to absorb the thousands of "unwanted" horses that were not slaughtered. Horses are simply being kept longer, sold to others, humanely euthanized, or donated to retirement and rescue facilities. The "surplus horse population" is a scare tactic.

Question: If slaughter is not an option, what will we do with sick, old and unwanted horses?

Answer: It is not realistic to suggest that those horses going to slaughter would need to be euthanized and disposed of following passage of the AHSPA. Most horses going to slaughter are marketable animals (per USDA study showing 92.3% in good condition), thus many horses previously slaughtered would instead be kept by their owners, sold to someone else or placed at sanctuaries.

But in terms of horses not slaughtered but rendered or buried, the numbers are small. Approximately 920,000 horses die annually in this country (10 percent of an estimated population of 9.2 million) and the vast majority are not slaughtered, but euthanized and rendered or buried without any negative environmental impact. Just over 100,000 horses were slaughtered in the U.S. in 2006. If slaughter were no longer an option and these horses were rendered or buried instead, it would represent a small increase in the number of horses being disposed of in this manner - an increase that the current infrastructure can certainly sustain.

Humane euthanasia and carcass disposal is highly affordable and widely available. The average cost of having a horse humanely euthanized and safely disposing of the animal's carcass is approximately \$225, while the average monthly cost of keeping a horse is approximately \$200.

Cost of Care a Government Burden

Question: If there is a ban on horse slaughter, will horse rescue and retirement groups have the resources to take care of horses given up by their owners?

Answer: Hundreds of horse rescue organizations operate around the country, and additional facilities are being established. However, most horses

currently going to slaughter will not need to be absorbed into the rescue community, but are marketable horses that will be sold to new owners. Sick and elderly horses should be euthanized by a licensed veterinarian.

Question: Should the government have to pay for the care of horses given up by their owners?

Answer: It is not the government's responsibility to provide for the care of horses voluntarily given up by their owners. The question is based upon the false premise that (1) horses no longer going to slaughter would have no other use, and (2) that these horses would become the financial responsibility of the federal government.

Horse owners, not the government, will remain responsible for the care of their horses. Owners who no longer wish to keep their horses and who cannot sell or place their horses in a new home will continue to have the option of humane euthanasia. The average cost for veterinarian-administered euthanasia and carcass disposal – approximately \$225, the cost of one month's care – is simply a part of responsible horse ownership.

Only sick and old horses go to slaughter

Question: Are only the old, infirmed and no longer serviceable horses slaughtered?

Answer: Horse slaughter advocates want you to believe that this is a 'service,' that horses being slaughtered are lame, old or ill-tempered. Yet the USDA funded Temple Grandin study of horses arriving at slaughter found that well over 90% (92.3%) met none of these criteria. In fact, the slaughter of healthy horses means greater profitability for the slaughter plant owners.

'Kill buyer' misrepresentation

Question: Are horse owners told when their horse is being bought for slaughter?

Answer: No. Horses wind up in the hands of self-described 'killer buyers' because their owners don't realize or are misled or both. Horses that go to slaughter are not necessarily unwanted, but rather are simply for sale. Many owners who do know of the possibility of their horse going to slaughter, will not sell until the ban is federal law.

Slippery slope

Question: What is next, cows?

Answer: The anti-slaughter movement has its roots in the horse owning and racing community and has no agenda beyond the protection of our horses. American horses are not raised for meat and it is a violation of our cultural values to allow their slaughter.

Economic Impact

Question: How will banning slaughter affect the economy?

Answer: The three slaughter plants closed last year were foreign owned, and paid no corporate taxes or export tariffs. The entire Horse meat 'industry' was only 0.001% the size of the U.S. meat industry, making it economically insignificant.

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Private property rights

Question: Does a horse slaughter ban affect people's property rights?

Answer: The property rights of horse owners are not dependent upon the operation of the 3 U.S. slaughter plants (recently closed).

Horse owners' property rights become an issue when they cannot sell their horses without any assurance they will not end up at slaughter. Owners regularly unknowingly send their horses to slaughter.

Horse owners' property rights become an issue when their horses are stolen out of pastures and barns every year for the horsemeat trade. Ohio newspapers reported the theft of two prized former racehorses that were sold to a killer buyer employed by one of the three foreign-owned horse slaughterhouses. Sky Dutcher, another victim, came to Washington, D.C. to tell the story of how her horse was stolen from his corral on her 12th birthday and sent to slaughter within two days. As already sited, horse theft has dropped drastically in California in the years following the ban.

Further, private property rights do not grant owners the unfettered right to abuse their animals. Every state has anti-cruelty laws that mandate protections for animals. Michael Vick would love to claim that his private property rights protect him from an indictment for dog-fighting, but that is clearly not a justification

for harming animals. Owners will still have ample legal options of reselling, donating, or euthanizing their horse (costs approx \$225 – the amount of one month's keep for a horse).

Standards of care at sanctuaries and rescue organizations

Question: Is it true no standards exist for horse rescue facilities that take unwanted horses?

Answer: The Animal Welfare Institute and Doris Day Animal League published "Basic Guidelines for Operating an Equine Rescue or Retirement Facility" in 2004. These and other materials are being incorporated into an expanded sanctuary accreditation program via the Homes for Horses Coalition (www.homesforhorses.org). Additionally, The Association of Sanctuaries and the American Sanctuaries Association provide accreditation programs, a code of ethics and guidelines for the operation of sanctuaries and rescue organizations. Horse rescue groups must also provide for the welfare of horses in their custody in compliance with state and local animal welfare laws.

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