

Fact Sheet:

THLN'S CONTINUED SUPPORT TO BAN HORSE SLAUGHTER IN THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

Horse slaughter is the practice of slaughtering horses to produce meat for human consumption. Since Americans do not eat horsemeat and since no horses are raised in America for the purpose of slaughter, a logical question would be “why do American’s want to slaughter America horses for human consumption?” The answer is “over 80% of us don’t.” However, well-funded special interest groups want to provide irresponsible and greedy horse owners a cheap and convenient way to dispose of unwanted horses by selling them to horse slaughter plants instead of re-homing or humanely euthanizing them. These horse slaughter plants in turn slaughter the horses and export the horsemeat to Europe, Japan and other countries where people eat horsemeat.

The political debate surrounding the slaughter of horses for human consumption occurs at both the state and federal level. To understand this complicated issue, it is helpful to understand the history of horse slaughter and current developments which will likely affect the future of horse slaughter in the United States.

History of Horse Slaughter

TEXAS: In 1949, Texas enacted a law that banned horse slaughter for human consumption. Despite the ban, Texas was home to two foreign-owned horse slaughter plants that blatantly ignored the ban and continued to operate for decades. These horse slaughter plants were: (1) Dallas Crown, Inc. in Kaufman and (2) Beltex Corporation in Fort Worth. Approximately 90% of the horsemeat produced in those plants was shipped via air freight to Europe and Japan for human consumption. The balance went to zoos and other institutions housing large carnivores. In essence, the majority of the horse slaughter profit went to foreign owned companies who paid no U.S. taxes and the horsemeat was exported for consumption by foreigners.

In 2007, the two Texas horse slaughter plants were ordered closed by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals following a protracted legal battle that lasted for over five years. The 5th Circuit Court’s ruling upheld the state’s 1949 ban on selling horsemeat for human consumption. Also, during the five years of legal proceedings, the Texas Legislature rejected various attempts by the horse slaughter industry to repeal the 1949 law banning horse slaughter.

OTHER STATES: During the legal battle leading to the closing of the Texas horse slaughter plants, a new horse slaughter plant was opened in DeKalb, Illinois by Carvel International, Inc. (also a foreign owned company). Later, the Illinois legislature banned horse slaughter in that state and the DeKalb facility was closed.

FEDERAL: In 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to end horse slaughter throughout the entire United States and to prohibit the exportation of live horses from the U.S. to foreign countries for slaughter. Unfortunately, the bill died in the Senate without ever coming to a vote. However, during that same 2006 Congressional session, the Congress passed legislation which prohibited the use of federal funds to pay USDA meat inspectors to inspect horsemeat. Further, in March 2007, a federal court in Washington, D.C. declared illegal an arrangement by which the horse slaughter plants were seeking to pay USDA inspectors to perform those meat inspections.

This effectively stopped the practice of horse slaughter in the United States. With the closing of the DeKalb plant and the two Texas facilities, no horse slaughter plants have operated in the United States since 2007. It’s important to note however, that horse slaughter is legal in Canada and Mexico and the transport of U.S. horses for slaughter in other countries is still legal. As a result, thousands of U.S. horses are being transported annually to Mexico and Canada for slaughter.

Current Horse Slaughter Developments

TEXAS: At the end of the 2011 Texas Legislative Session, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst requested the Texas Senate Committee on Agricultural and Rural Affairs (chaired by Sen. Craig Estes) to review state laws related to the closure of horse slaughter facilities and the impact that has had on the equine industry and agricultural sector of the Texas economy. On July 10, 2012, that Senate Committee held a public hearing in order to provide the Committee with facts and information to determine whether or not to recommend that the next legislature, convening in January 2013, take action on the horse slaughter issue or leave in place the 1949 ban on horse slaughter.

OTHER STATES: Texas is not the only state in which a return of horse slaughter is possible. For example, in March of 2012, Wyoming State Representative Sue Wallis proposed building a new horsemeat processing plant in Missouri or Arkansas. In May of 2012, Wallis sought local investors in Wyoming to help finance a plant which she said could cost between \$2 million and \$6 million which would process up to 200 horses a day for sale abroad and to ethnic markets within the U.S. To date, no investors have been found. Also, a cattle slaughter plant in New Mexico recently applied to the USDA for a permit to slaughter horses. This created intense opposition at the state and local level. As a result, the application for the permit was withdrawn.

FEDERAL: It is uncertain whether or not the 2012-2013 Federal Appropriations Bill being considered in the current Congress will include a prohibition of funding of USDA inspectors in horse slaughter plants. Without that prohibition — which has been included in every federal Appropriations Bill since 2006 — horse slaughter could resume in the United States if the USDA has the funding to hire inspectors to inspect horsemeat. It is anticipated that the Appropriations Bill will not contain the prohibition of funding of USDA inspectors in horse slaughter plants. Thus, the future status of funding federal horsemeat inspectors is uncertain. At the same time, the federal American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act has been reintroduced. If passed, this Act would end the slaughter of horses for human consumption in the U.S. and prohibit the domestic and international transport of live horses or horsemeat for human consumption. The bill has a large number of co-sponsors but has no traction in the current Congress and is unlikely to pass this session.

Other Developments that Could Affect Horse Slaughter in the United States

NEW EUROPEAN UNION LAW: Under a new law in the European Union, the importation of horsemeat from the United States will not be accepted. Human consumption of American horsemeat raises a number of potential health concerns, mainly due to the routine usage of medications in horses that are banned in food animals, and the lack of tracking this usage in horses. American horses are not "intended" for the human food chain. Substances routinely given to horses are dangerous to humans and most drugs and treatments routinely given to American horses are banned by the FDA from administration to food animals because of the drugs' toxicity to humans. For example, Clenbuterol and Phenylbutazone, known as "bute" or "horse aspirin," are commonly prescribed medications for horses. These drugs are administered to thoroughbreds and quarter horses, which are the most common breeds sent to slaughter. These substances, however, have been banned by the FDA and USDA for use in animals raised for human consumption.

Unlike livestock raised for food, where all potential medications are tested for withdrawal times, approved or banned for usage, and vigilantly tracked for each animal, there is no way to guarantee which medications have or have not been used in a particular horse. In fact, the European Commission Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) (Europe's equivalent to our USDA and FDA) found serious violations during inspections conducted in November and December 2010 of EU regulated plants in Mexico slaughtering horses for human consumption. As recent as June of 2012, Belgian authorities notified the European Commission which confirmed the presence of two unauthorized substances, Clenbuterol and Phenylbutazone, in horsemeat that was imported into the European Union from Canada in June. These unauthorized substances were found in frozen horsemeat that was subsequently distributed to Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. According to a recent audit conducted by the FVO, 85 percent of the horses slaughtered in Canada originate from the United States.

The EU currently requires drug history "passports" (a cradle-to-grave document) for all slaughter horses within its borders from the age of 6 months. This history "passport" program will be required for United States horses slaughtered for EU consumption beginning July of 2013. Once this EU law takes effect, it will make the import of horsemeat from the United States virtually impossible. The new law states horses slaughtered for human consumption in Europe would have to have documentation stating they were free of certain drugs from 6 months of age to death, but the United States currently has no method to track which medications a horse has received throughout its lifetime, which makes horsemeat a serious food safety/American food export risk. As American horses' lifetime medical histories are untraceable, there is no way of making sure that horses slaughtered for human consumption are free of these FDA-banned substances. The United States would have to spend millions of dollars implementing a national identification system and force owners to pay hundreds of dollars per animal to enter them into a national database. Additionally, there is no reliable way to remove horses from the food chain once they have been given prohibited substances. In sum, post-July of 2013, the EU's proposed drug usage "passport" will disqualify the majority of American horses for slaughter. Anyone seeking to profit from horse slaughter in the United States would be facing an impossible financial hurdle.

FINANCIAL RISKS TO HORSE SLAUGHTER PLANTS: Horse slaughter plant owners could have the rug pulled out from under them at any time. Not only is the EU drug usage "passport" enough to stop the re-introduction of horse slaughter plants in the United States, but the United States government could end a plant's operation at any time by passing the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act or de-funding USDA inspectors in subsequent Agricultural Appropriation budgets voted upon every fiscal year. It is hard to imagine a company spending millions of dollars to open and operate a plant when the future status of federal funding of horsemeat inspectors is extremely uncertain.

THLN's Reasons to Continue the Ban on Horse Slaughter

Owner and breeder responsibility is the answer. There are several arguments being made to bring back horse slaughter. These arguments come from organizations and individuals who profit from breeding or commercial use of horses, many of whom end up in the horse auctions. When the prices for horses for slaughter bottomed out in 2007, instead of looking inside the equine industry for answers or looking to a failed economy, they pointed to the ban on horse slaughter as the problem and re-introduction of slaughter as the solution. Horse slaughter actually encourages the over breeding of horses, a problem that is far more responsible for equine neglect and abandonment than is the shuttering of the horse slaughter industry. While the horse slaughter lobby has been claiming that abandonment was a result of a lack of slaughter options, it is in large part a result of gross over breeding.

Only 1 percent of America's 9 million horses are sent to slaughter each year, a number easily mitigated by responsible breeding and ownership practices, with plenty of humane alternatives to slaughter available. On average, the cost of euthanasia and disposal of a horse is equivalent to one month's care for a horse (approximately \$225). Horse ownership is a responsibility and a choice. If a person can no longer care for their horse, they have a responsibility to re-home the horse or opt for humane euthanasia. Providing proper care for a horse, which includes humane euthanasia when necessary, is just part of responsible ownership.

Many argue that slaughter is a "necessary evil" for sick and old horses. The USDA, however, found that more than 92.3% of all horses sent to slaughter are in good condition—it is not old, sickly horses that are being slaughtered. Many horses sent to slaughter would have gone to good homes or sanctuaries had they not fallen into the hands of "kill buyers" who outbid potential adopters at U.S. horse auctions. In California, where horse slaughter was banned in 1998, there has been no corresponding rise in cruelty and neglect cases, while horse theft dropped by 34% after the ban. In Illinois, when the horse slaughter plant was shut down, horse neglect and abuse decreased in that state. Allowing one's horse to starve is not an option in any state—state anti-cruelty laws prohibit such neglect. Many horses that go to slaughter are not unwanted, but rather wind up in the hands of "killer buyers" because they are in good health and will bring a better price per pound for their meat.

Horse Slaughter is Horse Abuse

Horse slaughter is not humane euthanasia. "Euthanasia" is a gentle, painless death provided in order to prevent suffering. Horse slaughter is a death fraught with terror, pain, and suffering. In a recent poll by Lake Research Partners, 80 percent of Americans said they strongly oppose horse slaughter. This is despite the AVMA allowing the penetrating captive bolt as an accepted method of killing horses. In allowing the penetrating captive bolt, the AVMA does not consider that horse slaughter occurs in a brutal kill environment where the required proper head restraint cannot be accomplished.

Horses differ from other livestock in that they have never been raised for the purpose of slaughter. Because horses are large flight animals with long necks that they throw about when frightened, the methods used to kill horses, even in state-of-the-art slaughter plants, rarely result in quick, painless deaths. Because of their biology, horses often endure repeated stuns or blows and sometimes remain conscious during their slaughter and dismemberment. The AVMA stated that the captive bolt gun should not be used on equines unless proper head restraint could be assured. This is because of the relatively narrow forehead of equines, their head shyness and the fact that the brain is set back further than in cattle for which the gun is intended. It is difficult for an operator in a slaughter house to assure proper placement of the gun. One study shows that neither the penetrating captive bolt gun nor gunshots are reliable means of ensuring that the horse is in fact killed or stunned because of a horse's cranium, and that the animal is more likely to simply be paralyzed, and therefore experience the full pain and awareness of being skinned and butchered alive during the final phase of the slaughter process.

Government documents reveal rampant cruelty violations at former horse slaughter plants under USDA inspection. Evidence showed horses were conscious when they were shackled and hoisted by a rear leg to have their throats cut. Evidence also showed employees whipping horses in the face and horses giving birth on the killing floors. The USDA released photos of horses with broken bones protruding from their bodies, eyeballs hanging by a thread of skin, and open wounds all taken at former U.S. horse slaughter houses.

Conditions of transport are appalling. Horses are typically hauled for more than 24 hours without rest, water or food in trailers that provide little protection from weather extremes. They are often forced onto double-decker cattle trailers with ceilings so low they injure their heads. Many horses – sick, lame, pregnant or blind – are in distress even before being loaded.

Horse experts agree that horse slaughter should not be allowed under any circumstances. THLN is not alone in its continued support to ban horse slaughter. The following organizations also believe a ban is the right approach: the Equine Welfare Alliance, Front Range Equine Rescue, Veterinarians for Equine Welfare, The Humane Society of the United States, ASPCA, Canadian Horse Defense Coalition, and the American Horse Defense Fund. This does not include the hundreds of horse industry groups, businesses, trainers, jockeys, Kentucky Derby winning owners, legislators and others who oppose horse slaughter.

"Not in our backyard" — the "Kaufman effect" will frighten any community

As mentioned above, Kaufman, Texas was home to one of three horse slaughter plants before the industry was effectively shuttered in 2007. After extensive review of the City's history during and after the operation of the plant, the following examples demonstrate that hosting a horse slaughter plant in one's city is wrought with inherent problems:

- ✦ There is an enormous burden the plant places on a city's environmental infrastructure, including its water treatment facility. For example, during the mid-eighties, the Kaufman plant was closed for nearly a year because neither the plant nor the city's water treatment facility was able to process the amounts of blood from the slaughtered horses, which was full of antibiotics. According to testimony, "blood was coming up into the streets, and into people's bathtubs."
- ✦ According to statistics, the desensitizing of workers being exposed to horse slaughter leads to increased crime rates. Kaufman's crime rate decreased 35 percent within one year of the plant closing.
- ✦ The cities have to put up with foreign businesses that don't care about the community in which they profit. For example, in a single 19 month period, the Dallas Crown plant was "out of compliance" 487 times, racking up 23 local citations that would have cost the company nearly \$1 million but was never paid.
- ✦ With the foul stench as well as the stigma of having a horse slaughter plant in your city, realtors can't sell properties and cities cannot grow future business and development.

Based on Kaufman, a slaughter plant opening may affect a city's crime rate, infrastructure, water quality, as well as costs to taxpayers, schools, hospitals, housing prices and future development. Horse slaughter plants pollute local water, decrease property values, permeate the air with a foul stench and are economically draining and environmentally damaging. The plant in Kaufman was closed in 2007, and five years later the community is still trying to recover from the damage caused by the horse slaughter plant as it ended up costing Texas taxpayers millions of dollars before the slaughter plant was finally closed.

By way of a recent example, the citizens of Mountain Grove, Missouri have vocally opposed any slaughter plant opening in their backyard at various city council meetings.

Summary

The horse-slaughter lobby represents a handful of powerful industries looking to bring horse slaughter back to the United States. Horses are our trusted companions and have played a historically significant role in American culture. Americans do not breed or raise horses for food and we don't eat horsemeat so why would we bring back a form of animal abuse that will only benefit foreign-owned corporations who profit by catering to overseas specialty markets?

For more information please contact THLN at www.thln.org