



EWA POSITION PAPER | GAO Submission – Horse Welfare

Equine Welfare Alliance is an umbrella organization representing over 120 organizations and hundreds of individuals across the United States and several countries worldwide. The organization focuses its efforts on the welfare of all equines and the preservation of wild equids.

Introduction

America has a special and unique historical relationship with the horse. In our nation's capitol one is greeted at every turn by statues of great Americans on horseback as acknowledgement of the contribution the horse made to building America. And that contribution continues every day in enumerable ways.

But the horse slaughter industry is not merely a betrayal of our horses and a blight on our collective conscience; it is often devastating to horse owners, to the communities where the plants are located and a serious health risk to the very people who consume the meat.

When we show complete indifference to the fate of these magnificent creatures, the communities where they are slaughtered and the people who unknowingly consume their contaminated meat, we are making a statement about America's collective values. The message could not be clearer. We are saying what many of our enemies abroad already believe, and that is that America is about profit and nothing more.

The Issues

Horse slaughter is a very complex issue with elements that are affected by many different state, federal and even foreign statutes and regulations. The Equine Welfare Alliance bases its opposition to horse slaughter on the following issues that will be discussed in this paper:

- Health Issues-Horses are Non-food Animals in the US [Page 2]
- Humane Issues [Page 4]
- Horse Theft [Page 8]
- Environmental Issues [Page 9]
- Financial Issues [Page 11]
- The Myths Surrounding Horse Slaughter [Page 12]
- Conclusion [Page 18]
- Sources [Page 19]

■ **Health Issues- Horses are Non-Food Animals in the U.S.**

American horses are bred and raised for non-food purposes. Once used as a prime mover for explorers, settlers, the military, agriculture and commerce, the domestic American horse was transitioned into new tasks over the past century. A study by Deloitte Consulting¹ in 2005 found that by use, the American horse population broke down as follows:

Recreation	3,906,923
Showing	2,718,954
Racing	844,531
Other	1,752,439
	9,222,847

Horses falling under the category “other” include those serving in law enforcement, farm and ranch horses, horses serving in presidential and military funerals and a host of other service functions. One also finds the growing field of therapy horses in this category.

In recent years, hippo-therapy has seen breakthroughs with autistic children and adults. Most recently, equine based therapy has been a tremendous help assisting returning soldiers with head injuries to regain their balance and in dealing with PTSD. Likewise, prison equine programs have been found to reduce recidivism. All of these forms of therapy are made possible because of the special connection between humans and horses forged over millennia.

Conspicuously absent in the study was any mention of horses being raised for meat. This is because horses being sent to slaughter from the US all come from one or more of the above categories.

Throughout their work and service lives, all of these horses are given medications such as Phenylbutazone (Bute, PZB), wormers, ointments, fertility drugs and many other medications used to treat and maintain their health. The vast majority of medications are clearly labeled “Not intended for food animals”. As one example, Bute is a known carcinogen that can cause aplastic anemia (bone marrow suppression) in humans. Bute is banned for all food producing animals and there is no acceptable withdrawal period.

It should be noted that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies horses as non-food animals and thus, has no drug protocols for horse medications. Specifically, phenylbutazone, the most common non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) for musculoskeletal injuries in horses, is banned by the FDA because of dangerous and deadly side effects in humans.

First and foremost, the United States does not have a tracking system for horses as we do for livestock. Many horses are stolen and sent to slaughter or have had multiple owners. Without a tracking system such as NAIS or the EU “Passport” system, the USDA cannot certify that a horse is free of prohibited substances.

The market for horse meat is overseas so the United States must adhere to the European Union (EU) [regulations](#). The regulations state that a horse that has been given a prohibited substance cannot enter the food chain. Neither withdrawal periods nor general quarantine are adequate to address this issue. Furthermore, the regulations state that the only wild equidae meat that will be accepted is zebra meat-making our Mustangs ineligible for horse slaughter for human consumption.

It is very clear that with the strong opposition to NAIS that ranchers and horse owners do not want their horses tracked.

The continuous flow of abandoned horse stories speaks volumes of the inability to track and certify horses. If the owners of the “abandoned” horses cannot be found, the horses cannot be certified as drug free.

The drugs that are administered to race horses make them ineligible for human consumption horse slaughter. In a recent [study](#) of race horses² presented for slaughter were tracked from their lip tattoos and racing records. All the horses traced were found to have been given PBZ, some as recently as the day of slaughter.

The vast majority of horses going to slaughter have received one or several of the medications that are prohibited. The question remains, what horses in the US meet the drug certification requirements? It is not fiscally responsible to spend millions of dollars on a horse slaughter plant and re-secure funding for inspectors with an insignificant number of horses that can be certified for human consumption slaughter.

■ Humane Issues

Euthanasia is derived from the Greek words, Eu meaning Good and Thanatos meaning death, i.e. Good Death. The captive bolt method used in US plants did not provide death and cannot, under any circumstances, be called humane euthanasia. The bolt was designed to stun bovines and is [not acceptable](#) for horses.

Many of the groups supporting slaughter continually cite AVMA or AAEP stating the captive bolt is acceptable for slaughtering horses. What they fail to mention is the AVMA guidelines were written by veterinarians for veterinarians and are being misused in support of slaughter. The AVMA studies were performed by veterinarians in a controlled environment, not in a mass slaughter environment by unskilled workers. The AAEP clearly states on their website that humane euthanasia is a veterinary procedure. The AAEP further states that the animal must be calm, sedated or humanely restrained, none of which occurs with horses at a slaughter plant.

The horse slaughter industry in the U.S. was unknown to the general public, until 2003, when federal legislation (HR 857 or 503) was introduced in the House. Americans were shocked when they learned that U.S. horses were being slaughtered for their meat to be consumed in foreign countries for gourmet dining. The meat is not consumed by the poor, but at \$20 - \$40 per pound, it was meant only for the wealthy. Horse slaughter became known as "America's Dirty Little Secret".

American horses are not bred as a food animal in the U.S. and they are named, tamed, and trained as companion animals, work animals, therapy animals, athletes and many other recreational activities. They have learned to trust in humans and to slaughter them for their meat is a betrayal to animals regarded as companion animals. Americans don't eat their pets. Non-food animals are humanely euthanized in the US, not slaughtered.

The claim that slaughtered horses are old and infirm was disproved by a study performed by the renowned Dr. Temple Grandin³. The following table shows that Grandin found only 3% of the horses arriving at slaughter to be skinny or emaciated. The same study dispels a further myth; that ill mannered or dangerous horses make up a significant proportion of the horses being slaughtered. Grandin found only 1 horse in 1,008 to be of such temperament!

In fact, even after being subject to the brutalities of slaughter transport, only 7.7% of the horses had any issue at all, implying that 92.3% of these horses were in good condition and could have served useful functions in the equine industry.

Grandin study table 5; Severe Welfare Problems on 1008 Horses
 Minor Abrasions, old completely healed injuries, or slight unsoundness are not included

	Number	Percentage
Skinny and emaciated	30	3%
Foot problems - foundered or bent over foot or bowed tendons	12	1%
Deformities	2	.4%
Broken leg at origin	4	.3%
Down on vehicle due to weak condition	4	.3%
Large deep cuts	6	.5%
Eye injuries	2	.4%
Dead on arrival or died shortly after unloading	4	.3%
Extensive infections	3	.2%
Behavior problem	1	.09%
Kick and bite marks over extensive parts of the body (live evaluation)	4	.3%
Severe facial lacerations	3	.2%
Back scrapes during transport (severe only)	3	.2%
Total severe welfare problems	78 hd.	7.7%

Horse slaughter plants do not want the old, skinny and lame horses, but are looking for the fat and healthy animals for a higher quality of meat. In fact, when the horse slaughter facilities were operating in the U.S., private owners hauled their own horses to slaughter had to pay a disposal fee if their horses were underweight.

The road to slaughter for many of these unfortunate animals begins at the auction, where many owners will sell their horses to the highest bidders. Many owners are unaware that just by selling a horse at auction, their horse could end up slaughtered. Persons who are contracted by the horse slaughter companies, known as "kill buyers" will purchase horses to fill their truckload, and the horses will be hauled to feedlots in the U.S., which are operated by foreign owned facilities over our borders in Mexico and Canada.

The inhumane cruelty begins during the transport to slaughter, where horses are crammed into trailers and hauled long distances without rest, food or water. It should be noted this occurred when the US plants were in operation with transports across the US as well as to Mexico and Canada. Mares, stallions and foals are loaded into the same trucks and are not separated, often resulting in fights which lead to injury and even death. Documents obtained by the Freedom of Information Act from the USDA depicts how cruel and inhumane the transport to slaughter is, and can be viewed [here](#).

Horse slaughter is not humane euthanasia. It is violently terrifying and cruel. Despite AVMA's claim that it is humane, one viewing of any horse slaughter video proves otherwise, and does not require a veterinarian's license to know this is horrifically inhumane. The captive bolt was not built for horses and the required head restraint is impossible due to the long necks of horses. The captive bolt does not cause death, it was designed to stun so the animal is alive for the required bleeding out of the meat. They are hoisted into the air by one hind leg, hung upside down while

their throats are slit so the heart can pump the blood from the meat, and they are often skinned alive while conscious.

An affidavit from Dr. Lester Friedlander, DVM & former Chief USDA Inspector, was presented to the Members of Congress on February 29, 2008, urging them to support HR 503 and S311. He stated, "The captive bolt is not a proper instrument for the slaughter of equids, these animals regain consciousness 30 seconds after being struck, they are fully aware they are being vivisected."

Undercover films have been made showing the actual slaughter process. A very graphic series of photos showing this process is available [here](#).

In March of 2010, undercover [footage](#) was released by the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition of two slaughter plants in Canada further proving that horse slaughter is inhumane no matter where it takes place or what method is used.

Less than one year after Tom Lenz' thumbs-up of a Mexican slaughter plant, the European Commission has launched an [investigation](#) that may result in shutting down the plant.

A hidden-camera videotape taken at Beltex by the [Humane Society of the United States](#) in 1994 shows animals writhing and shuddering well after the stun gun is applied.

In a sworn statement before Cook County, State of Illinois, a former employee [name withheld] of Cavel International, a horse slaughtering plant now closed but owned by the same company as Beltex and Dallas Crown, testified the following:

"In July 1991, they were unloading one of the double-decker trucks. A horse got his leg caught in the side of the truck so the driver pulled the rig up and the horse's leg popped off. The horse was still living, and it was shaking. [Another employee] popped it on the head and we hung it up and split it open. ... Sometimes we would kill near 390, 370 a day. Each double-decker might have up to 100 on it. We would pull off the dead ones with chains. Ones that were down on the truck, we would drag them off with chains and maybe put them in a pen or we might drag them with an automatic chain to the knockbox. Sometimes we would use an electric shocker to try to make them stand. To get them into the knockbox, you have to shock them ... sometimes run them up the [anus] with the shocker. ... When we killed a pregnant mare, we would take the guts out and I would take the bag out and open it and cut the cord and put it in the trash and sometimes the baby would still be living, and its heart would be beating, but we would put it in the trashcan."

The Doris Day Animal League states, "Callous treatment at the slaughterhouse often results in prolonged suffering. Panicked horses are often prodded and beaten off the truck and into the kill-chute. Improper use of stunning equipment, designed to render the animal unconscious with a swift shot to the head, means that horses sometimes endure repeated blows, and remain conscious during their own slaughter, including throat slitting."

Shelley Sawhook from the American Horse Defense Fund states, "The entire process including the slaughter auction, the method of transportation, the feedlots, the slaughter plants...everything up to and including their death is inhumane. The horses stand in line smelling the blood, sensing the terror. They are electrocuted or speared into the "kill box" where they shake violently, falling, unable to stand from fear. They are repeatedly bludgeoned with the "captive dead-bolt" gun which drives a four-inch spike into their skull, rendering the horse not dead but unconscious. Alive and many times still conscious, the horse is then shackled, hoisted, throats slit, bled and dismembered. It is man's ultimate betrayal to the horse."

Henry Skjerven, a former director at Natural Valley Meats in Canada that was owned by Velda, the same owners of the former Cavel plant in Illinois, [stated](#) that horse slaughter "was the worst four minutes of a horse's life."

These are [statements](#) made from Veterinarians for Equine Welfare.

"Why would the AAEP and AVMA support such an industry? Have they considered the inevitable suffering that the current situation brings about as opposed to the hypothetical suffering that these horses endure if they live?"

- *Nicholas H. Dodman, DVM, Diplomate ACVA and ACVB*

"From the time a horse is picked up by the killer buyer he is meat on the hoof, and that is the way he is treated. In a journey which can take days, or occasionally weeks, he is jammed into trucks, often where he cannot even stand, and left to fend for himself among a load of other terrified horses. Some of these horses actually have fractures and are in great pain. USDA regulations state that they can go 28 hours without food and water (bad enough) and even this is unenforceable. When the horse reaches the slaughterhouse, death is by captive bolt, and if anyone thinks this always works the first time, we have a film they should see. As a veterinarian I realize the inevitability of euthanasia in certain cases, but to equate the slaughter process with humane euthanasia is the height of hypocrisy."

- *John K. Griggs, DVM*

"As a veterinarian, I believe that it is my responsibility to treat all of my patients in a humane manner. Looking at the condition of slaughter-bound horses in the videos and photographs taken by journalists, investigators and welfare personnel (over many years), I could never explain to a client or to a child what is humane about their transport, and I would certainly never recommend this avenue of disposing of a horse to a client. If I cannot support these practices to my clients as being humane, how can I stand up as a professional and present them to the public as such?"

- *Nena J. Winand, DVM, PhD*

"I am appalled that the AVMA supports this inhumane treatment of horses. The practice of sending "unwanted horses" to slaughter is simply a matter of economic convenience for uncaring or uneducated horse owners. The cost of humane euthanasia is similar to the cost of keeping a horse for one month. Anyone who keeps horses, whether for profit or pleasure, should be able to plan for this final expense."

- *Linda Breitman, DVM*

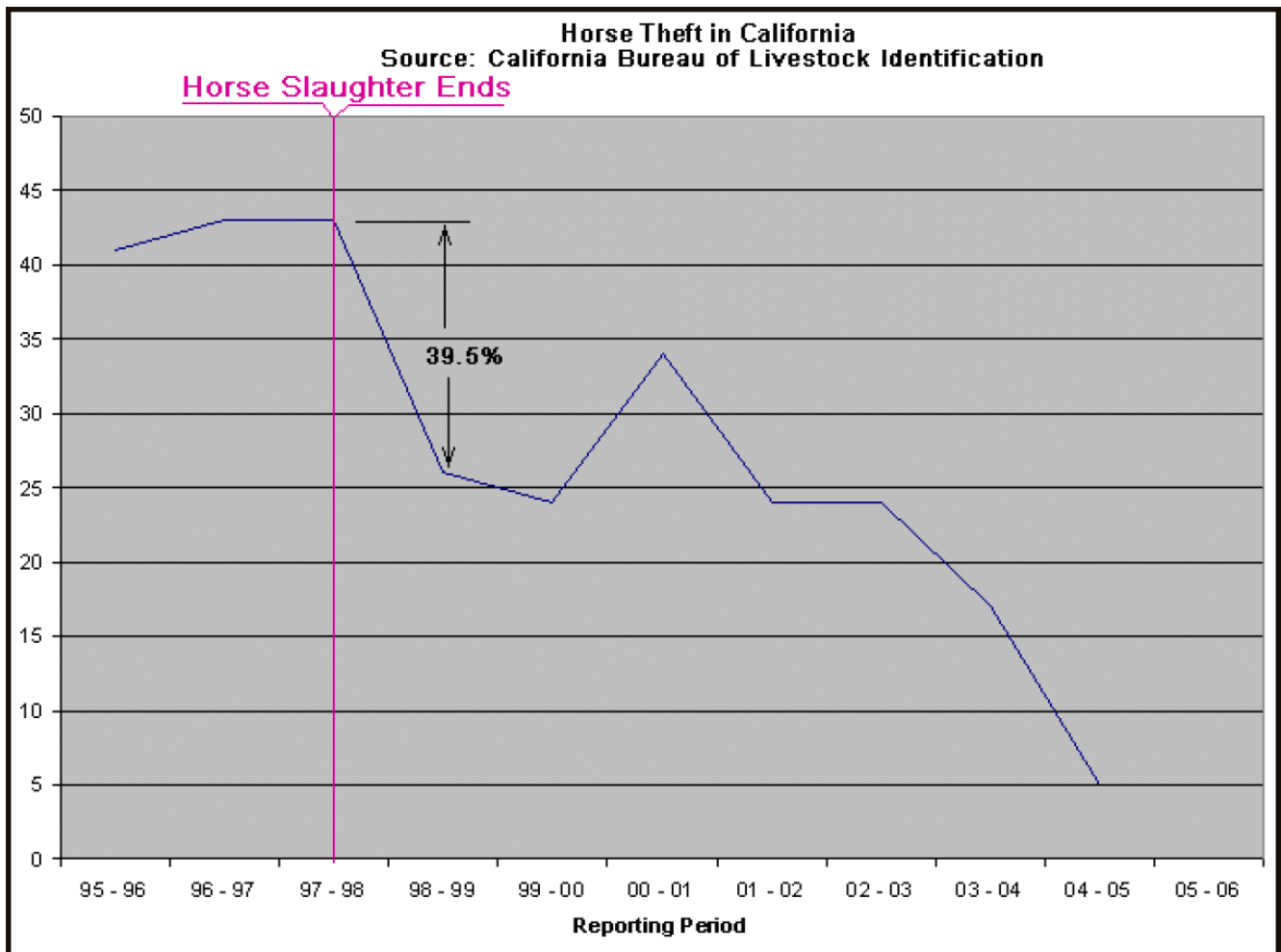
■ Horse Theft

Horse slaughter is the perfect outlet for horse thieves because it assures the destruction of the evidence of their crime. The issue of stolen horses entering the slaughter pipeline was so significant in Texas that a state law was passed assessing the slaughter houses \$5 per horse to fund a program to combat it.

The program allocated \$3 of this fee to brand inspectors from the Texas Southwest Cattlemen's Association (TSCRA) to perform brand inspection and \$2 to Texas A&M to educate the horse owning public on ways to protect the horses.

The Texas program was an abject failure. The TSCRA caught virtually none of the stolen horses before they were slaughtered, and Texas A&M became so fond of the funding source that certain academics in their agriculture program became outspoken proponents of continuing slaughter.

The best evidence on the linkage between horse slaughter and horse theft comes from California where proposition 6 outlawed horse slaughter and export of horses from the state for slaughter. As can be seen in the graph, there was a 39.5% reduction in horse theft following the passage of prop 6.



■ Environmental Issues

Horse slaughter plants are notorious polluters. The Dallas Crown horse slaughter plant in Kaufman, Texas was ordered closed by the town's Board of Adjustments in March of 2006, but managed to tie the process up with appeals until it was closed under an unrelated state law in 2007.

Similarly, the Cavel plant in Illinois, after being destroyed by fire in 2002, was rebuilt to be a "state of the art" facility in 2004. When the plant was closed by an Illinois law against horse slaughter in 2007, it had been in continuous violation of its sewage discharge every month of its operation and owed over \$100,000 in back fines.



Waste treatment tank at Cavel ruptures and foams over, March 2007.

The Cavel Plant's operator, Velda Group LLC of Belgium, moved their operations to the Natural Valley Farms facility in Saskatchewan, Canada in the fall of 2007 where it was soon caught illegally discharging blood and other waste into a local river and a lagoon behind the plant, and dumping tons of internal organs and other waste onto the ground near the plant. It was ordered closed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for health violations in January of 2009.

The story has been much the same where ever American horses have been slaughtered. Several factors are believed to contribute to this problem;

1. Horses have 1.74 times as much blood per pound of body weight as cows and blood is difficult to treat.
2. Horse blood often contains drugs which make it unwanted by rendering plants and harder to treat (antibiotics in the blood kill bacteria used in the treatment process).
3. By-products such as intestines are not wanted by pet food manufacturers.



Internal organ waste lies exposed to the elements at Natural Valley Farms

In the slaughter of conventional food animals such as cattle and pigs, almost all byproducts from the blood to the internal organs have a market. This is not true for horses, partially because of the stigma associated with "horse meat" as an ingredient and partly because drugs and wormers used in horses make the byproducts potentially toxic.

For example, all major pet food companies ceased using horse meat and horse meat byproducts in the 1980s. The reason for this was a combination of a requirement to label the ingredient as "horse" and the fact that the meat often contained various drugs. For example, a common horse wormer called ivermectin, can be deadly to certain collie breeds. The drug passes only one way through the brain blood barrier, thus accumulating in the brain and resulting in encephalitis and even death.

With no secondary market for these byproducts, horse slaughter facilities face a major disposal problem. The results are usually illegal dumping. At one time, the Dallas Crown plant attempted to force discharge into the Kaufman sewer system with a pump, resulting in blood backing up into bathtubs and drains in the neighborhood behind the plant.

■ Financial Issues

Horse slaughter proponents often claimed that the horse slaughter business supports “the bottom” of the horse industry and that through some unspecified form of economic alchemy, this market segment influences the price of horses throughout the entire industry.

This claim is never explained but merely put forward as fact. However, the argument completely ignores the incredible financial insignificance of the horse slaughter industry. According to the Deloitte study, the horse industry generates \$39 billion in direct revenues annually, and \$102 billion in indirect revenues. The horse slaughter industry contributes less than \$40 million.



So small is the relative contribution of horse slaughter that it cannot be meaningfully displayed as a bar graph or pie chart. However, one look at the contribution in terms of every \$100 of industry revenue can provide a reasonable perspective.

Since horse slaughter is insignificant as a source of industry revenue, it is impossible that it somehow influences the financial health of the entire industry. The market for horse meat simply generates a low end demand that encourages over breeding and poor animal husbandry. Far from being an answer to the problem of excess horses (inappropriately called unwanted horses by slaughter proponents), it virtually assures their production.

■ The Myths of Horse Slaughter

Proponents of horse slaughter present many arguments that have no evidence or merit to support their statements.

Horse slaughter as a means to end abuse, neglect, starvation and abandonment

Some people hypothesize that slaughtering horses will prevent starvation, neglect, abuse and abandonment of horses. There is no evidence to support these statements. In truth, these claims illogically state that by killing the victim of a possible crime before such a crime occurs; you can therefore prevent the crime. Would it be logical to murder our daughters to prevent a criminal from committing a possible future rape? This does not make sense and we have never resorted to killing the victims of possible future crimes in this country.

Furthermore, a ban on horse slaughter will not lead to an increase in horse abuse and neglect. In California, horse slaughter was banned in 1998, and there has been no corresponding rise in cruelty and neglect cases, although horse theft dropped 39.5% percent the year after the ban. Each state carries anti-cruelty laws, and these should be enforced as the means to end abuse, neglect, starvation and abandonment, rather than relying on horse slaughter.

Horse slaughter promoters currently claiming that a rise in abuse and neglect cases is due to a lack of horse slaughter in the US, have failed to take into consideration that more than 134,000 U.S. horses were exported for slaughter in 2008 after the closure of the U.S. facilities, compared to 122,459 US equines slaughtered in 2007 when the U.S. facilities were in operation. Therefore, any current cases of abandonment, abuse and neglect, cannot be blamed on a lack of slaughter. Not until the U.S. facilities closed and the banning of horse slaughter became such a controversial issue, did the abandonment of a horse become such widely publicized news. Horses were also abandoned when the facilities were open in the U.S., but the USDA does not record these statistics.

It should be noted that the largest case of neglect in the US took place in 2005 when all three plants were in operation.

Further proof is the [study](#)⁴ by John Holland during the period from 2002-2004 when Cavel was shut down due to a fire. The reported cases of abuse and neglect decreased. The study further indicates that abuse and neglect is directly tied to the unemployment rate. Holland researched the correlation and warned of an increase in neglect if the economy continued to decline.

Actually, the availability of horse slaughter does have a direct correlation to neglect, such as when owners find themselves in a situation of not being able to care for their horse(s) and will not sell or donate their horse(s) for fear they will end up on a slaughter truck. If slaughter was a viable or acceptable option to these owners, they would sell their horse(s) instead of keeping an animal that they realize they can't afford to feed. Rather than allow the possibility that their horse could end up slaughtered, despite the consequences, they'll hang on to it instead.

Not only can the potential increase in abuse cases be offset by additional resources assigned to manage that situation but also by the decrease in abuse cases that currently stem from owners unwilling to relinquish their horses for fear they will end up in the slaughter pipeline and by the increased capacity of rescues which will be able to adopt horses out more aggressively without fear the horses will be redirected to slaughter.

Horse Slaughter as a means to Control the population

Horse slaughter does not control the population. It is a symptom of the problem. The only means of controlling the population is at the source. The only means to control the population is by reducing the amount of horses being bred. Horse slaughter incents the problem by rewarding the production of excess horses. There is no reason to control the population when there is a foreign market driving and rewarding the production of excess horses.

The number of horses slaughtered is driven by the market demand for horse meat, not the number of excess horses. This is clearly evident in the USDA statistics that change with the increases and decreases for the demand. In years where the demand was on the increase, horses were imported into the US for slaughter.

In 1989 more than 350,000 horses were slaughtered in the US. By 2002 those numbers dropped to under 50,000 horses slaughtered without any significant increase of abandonment, abuse or neglect. The excess 300,000 horses had been reabsorbed into the live horse population without notice.

However, a major factor that stands out to support the theory that it's the demand for horse meat that drives the numbers of slaughtered horses, is that in 1989 and during the earlier 1990's, there were 17 horse slaughter facilities operating in the US, and the high numbers of horses slaughtered during those years correlate to filling the demand for those 17 horse slaughter facilities. As the horse slaughter plants in the US began to shut down and the demand for horse meat lessened, the number of horses slaughtered also decreased. The numbers depended on how many plants had shut down, and how many horses the remaining plants were capable of slaughtering.

In an article from the Philadelphia Enquirer by Amy Worden, April 25, 2001, entitled "Foot-And-Mouth Disease Boosts Demand for U.S. Horse Meat Exports" <http://www.purefood.org/madcow/horse42501.cfm>, this excerpt clearly reveals how the demand was on the rise for horse meat during the foot-and-mouth disease scare, and how the numbers of horses slaughtered increased due to the need to fill that supply:

"As the animal health crisis -- and fears of tainted meat -- has grown in Europe in recent months, industry experts say, the price of horse meat here has soared by as much as 30 percent. And more horses than ever are heading for slaughterhouses here and in Canada.

USDA figures show that 6,961 horses were slaughtered in three U.S. plants last month, compared with 5,649 last March. In the first three months of this year, as Europe struggled with foot-and-mouth disease on the heels of the mad-cow scare, the number of horses killed here has inched upward.

The new demand has been a boon for slaughterhouse owners, the buyers who work for them, and individuals trying to unload unwanted horses.

In Texas, home to two slaughterhouses, 11,000 horses were killed in the first quarter of this year, compared with 8,600 in the last quarter of 2000, according to the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. Export horse-meat prices, which hovered at 45 to 50 cents a pound for the last two years, had jumped to 75 cents to 80 cents a pound last week.

The new demand could be spurring an increase in horse thefts as well, although it is too early to tell for sure, said Rob Hosford of the Texas cattle association. The 125-year-old group, which operates the state's horse inspection program, reported that horse thefts rose by more than 50 percent from 1999 to 2000.

"There are some substantial dollars in the real market and virtually nothing to lose in the black market," Hosford said. "That's fast cash."

He said that a horse could be stolen, slaughtered, packaged, shipped to Europe, and served before a ranch owner realized that the animal was missing.

With no domestic market, horse slaughterhouses in the United States all but disappeared in the last decade. Once there were as many as 15 plants, killing 350,000 horses a year, mostly for consumption abroad. Although there was never a federal law banning horse slaughter or the sale of horse meat, public sentiment against the killing of horses helped drive the industry under, say horse welfare advocates.

Last year, the two Texas slaughterhouses, along with one in Illinois, killed about 60,000 horses, according to the USDA. A Nebraska facility that closed earlier this year may reopen as a result of the new demand, Hosford said.

And a total of 60,000 horses, about half of which are shipped from the United States, are slaughtered for export each year in Canada. Claude Bouvry, who owns Bouvry Exports, the largest slaughterhouse operation in North America, said his business cannot process horses fast enough.

"There is demand for horse meat; [importers] are showing more interest, but supplies are limited," said Bouvry, who runs three slaughterhouses in Calgary and Quebec. He refused to disclose the exact number of horses killed because he said he did not want people to envision a "pile of bodies." He said his wholesale prices are up about 20 percent, from 50 cents a pound in August to 60 cents today."

If the lack of slaughter truly causes abandonment and abuse cases, then we should have been overrun with abandoned and starving horse cases in 2003, after the numbers of slaughtered horses had fallen to below 50,000 in 2002. But in 2002, since people were relatively unaware of the horse slaughter industry, they didn't have horse slaughter to blame as a cause for abuse and neglect cases, or credit it as being a necessary cure. Furthermore, despite the 300,000 decrease of horses slaughtered by 2002 compared to 1989, no one was aware of the "excess" numbers of horses that had simply infiltrated into the live horse population, and the problem of "excess" or "unwanted" horses was not known. However, believing horse slaughter is associated with abuse and abandonment is merely a myth, and while it can't be blamed for horse abandonment cases, it has proven that slaughtering horses does not cure or prevent abandonment, abuse or neglect.

During the years that the US plants were in operation, horses were also being exported to Canada and Mexico without complaint from the supporters of horse slaughter, who now complain that due to the closure of the US facilities, horses are forced to suffer inhumane slaughter in Canada and Mexico. Not only were horses exported over our borders for slaughter, but when the US facilities did not have enough horses to meet the demand for horsemeat abroad, the US facilities imported horses from Canada for slaughter in the US. In 2005 - 2007, 14,375 horses were imported into the US for slaughter. If we had so many excess horses, why did the US need to import more from Canada?

USDA import statistics from Canada:

2005 - 7,865 horses imported for slaughter in the U.S.

2006 - 4,022 horses imported for slaughter in the U.S.

2007 - 2,488 horses imported for slaughter in the U.S.

14,375 Canadian horses imported to the U.S. for slaughter

The positive national economic impact of retaining live horses is far greater than the negative impact of slaughtering horses. Currently, horses have a total impact on the US Gross Domestic Product of \$112.1 BILLION, including \$25.3 Billion direct and 86.8 Billion indirect, according to the American Horse Council. Horse slaughter represents .03 for every \$100 earned in the industry.

The world economy is taking its toll and the markets for luxury items, such as horse meat, are declining. If the market demand suddenly took a sharp drop, there are no plans in place to handle the excess horses that are continually produced each year.

Addressing the cause of the excess horses being produced each year is the only method to control the horse population.

The American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) who supports slaughter and is one of the largest U.S. horse associations, talks about "unwanted horses"; but it makes its intentions to increase breeding to prevent a "horse shortage" very clear. At the 2008 AQHA Convention, Bill Brewer [stated](#), "Now our challenge becomes looking at ways to introduce an 'equine economic stimulus package' that will boost registration numbers so we don't have a horse shortage in a few years."

According to the article "Leading Indicators" in the January issue of Equus Magazine ([Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)) the AQHA has boosted their registration numbers: 140,000 Quarter Horses were registered in 2008, which is up from 135,787 in 2007. Clearly, if there is a horse overpopulation, the AQHA is contributing to it, while claiming that horse slaughter is needed to prevent an overpopulation of horses. Quarter horses are the number one breed sent to slaughter for human consumption.

The "Unwanted" Horses

The term unwanted connotes property having no value. When disposing of an unwanted property, the owner is not paid and usually will pay to dispose of the property. The term "unwanted" relating to horses is nothing more than part of a massive disinformation campaign. With all the "unwanted" horses being portrayed and the supposed lack of slaughter, why are so many excess horses being produced every year? The availability of slaughter hasn't reduced the excess horses but perpetuates the issue without consequence.

Slaughter is a market driven business. The amount of horses slaughtered is commensurate with the market demand for horse meat. The kill buyers do not buy "unwanted" horses but the amount of horses needed to meet the demand. As of November 2009, the exports from Canada are down 20% and are analyzed in John Holland's study, [Horse Slaughter Trends from 2006 through 2009](#). That translates to 20% less horses that were slaughtered further proving the amount of horses slaughtered is not dependent on the amount of horses available. If the demand continues to decrease, the excess horse issue will continue to escalate.

Slaughter is a symptom, not a cure. The cause must be addressed to reduce the excess horses produced every year.

Zoos will be prevented from feeding their big cats an adequate diet.

Zoos will still be able to legally feed horse meat to their big cats, as the bill will only ban the domestic slaughter of horses for human consumption.

However, there is a growing trend to feed a beef-based diet to captive big cats. Several USDA-licensed facilities that keep big cats like lions and tigers have switched to such diets because it is a healthier alternative for these species. Horses are routinely treated with many drugs that are prohibited for use in animals raised for food.

We will Reopen Horse Slaughter Plants with Tighter Regulations

There is no evidence to conclude that this would be possible. To this day, the meager regulations that are in place are still not enforced such as double decker cattle trucks transporting horses on the last leg to slaughter. Slaughter proponents have opposed even the slightest change to make any portion of the slaughter pipeline more humane as evidenced by their opposition to permanently prohibit double decker cattle trucks for horse transport.

During all the years that horse slaughter plants were operating domestically, no efforts were made to make any adjustments, even with horse welfare advocates continually releasing investigation after investigation. The transport violations that have been uncovered have all taken place within US borders making the long hauls over the borders responsible, a moot argument. The numerous waste water violations were never corrected and fines of \$180k are still owed to the city of Kaufman Texas.

To even consider reopening slaughter plants, a system must be in place to identify a horse as a food animal from birth with vet records that follow the horse and Inspectors must be made to shut down lines when violations occur that serve the welfare of the horse and not profits.

In addition, a system must be in place to identify and return stolen horses to their owners.

The state of Texas implemented a "brand inspection" program at the Beltex and Dallas Crown slaughter plants specifically to assure that stolen equines be identified and removed from slaughter. The state required the plants pay \$2 per horse to the Texas Southwest Cattle Raisers Association for the service. In the years the program was in effect, no stolen horse was ever saved, though several were later determined from their hides to have been slaughtered.

Foreign owned plants will be made to pay federal taxes as all US businesses are required to pay.

A multi-million dollar business [paying \\$5.00](#) in federal tax is unacceptable. There is no evidence that this is possible considering no efforts were made to tighten the loopholes when the US plants were in operation.

Property Rights

This argument by slaughter proponents has no merit. Owning property doesn't give the owner the right to abuse the property or the right to treat the property in any manner he chooses. More importantly, owning property does not give the owner complete dominion over disposing of the property. An owner of cars, computers, appliances, hazardous materials, etc. cannot dispose of his property in any manner he chooses. Some areas already have laws on horse disposal.

Ending horse slaughter does not remove the owner's right to end his horse's life humanely and dispose of the horse in accordance with local laws. If the horse cannot be buried, he can be rendered or cremated. Many state departments of agriculture offer low cost euthanasia and disposal as do local veterinarian colleges and numerous rescues.

Ending a horse's life humanely is not an argument of morals. It is an argument of owner responsibility and ending an animal's life as you would with any non-food animal. We do not slaughter non-food animals.

It is a responsibility that all animal owners face and should be taken into consideration before owning a horse and especially before breeding a horse. The years of horse slaughter have removed owner responsibility for the owners of less than 2% of the horse population that is slaughtered. The responsibility of ownership resides with the owner, not with horse welfare advocates, rescues, the government or any other groups. It is time owners are held accountable for horses they own or choose to breed. Horse slaughter allows breeders the convenience of breeding and dumping. Until the incentive is removed and breeders are held accountable for the excess horses they continue to produce, the excess horse "problem" will never be addressed.

The US is condemning foreign country cultures by banning horse slaughter

Banning horse slaughter is not going to change the eating habits of other countries or condemn citizens in foreign countries for what they eat. In the US, we do not eat horse meat. That is our culture. In other countries, they are free to eat whatever they choose.

We do not believe that a US non food animal should be slaughtered for consumption by humans in other countries. We do not allow this with dogs when their careers or work life have ended although there are foreign markets for their meat.

Banning horse slaughter is the first step to banning livestock slaughter and bringing down animal agriculture (aka the slippery slope).

Ending the slaughter of a non food animal will have no impact on the slaughter of acceptable food sources in the US.

■ Conclusion

The vast majority of horses that have been sent to slaughter have been horses that could not be certified as food animals. As such, opening or reopening slaughter plants will not address the excess horse issue.

We recommend that the FDA and USDA join forces to track the administration of banned substances to horses and stop the slaughter or exportation for slaughter of horses with a positive history. If such a process cannot be put in place expeditiously, both agencies should ensure that horse carcasses only be used for non-human purposes.

We further recommend that Congress swiftly pass the 2009 Equine Protection Acts, HR 503 and S 727. Our government must step up and recognize horses as non-food animals and immediately stop the flow of unsafe horses for human consumption to unsuspecting consumers in European markets.

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"I would like to impress upon you that the AVMA and AAEP may represent me by profession, but they do not represent me on this issue and until they can show you polling of their membership reflecting it, please do not believe that their governing bodies represent the views of the people they claim to either. Accordingly, I urge you to support HR 503 in any and every way you can!!!!
Thank You!!!!"
- Kerry Zeigler, VMD

Contributors:

EWA Board
EWA Subject Matter Experts
Canadian Horse Defence Coalition
Alex Brown, Alex Brown Racing

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Full URLs to Hot Links:

- Page 2 (regulations) http://equinewelfarealliance.org/uploads/EU_Import_Regulations_letter.pdf
- Page 3 (study) http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6T6P-4YF5RB0-1&_user=10&_coverDate=02%2F20%2F2010&_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_orig=search&_sort=d&_doc_anchor=&_view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=304a6dd77eafe6489a5812b83c0591d3
- Page 4 (not acceptable) http://www.vetsforequinewelfare.org/white_paper.php
- Page 6 (here) <http://www.equineadvocates.com/hs/inside.html>
- Page 6 (footage) <http://www.defendhorsescanada.org/ChambersofCarnage.html>
- Page 6 (investigation) <http://www.animals-angels.com/index.php?pageID=628>
- Page 6 (Humane Society of the United States) <http://www.hsus.org/ace/352>
- Page 7 (stated) http://www.manesandtailsorganization.org/howling_ridge/Howling-Ridge-July-29-Henry-Natural-
- Page 7 (statements) <http://www.vetsforequinewelfare.org/support.php>
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