



EDITORIAL | The True Unintended Consequences of Horse Slaughter

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Over the years, we've written about the nonsensical arguments used by those in support of horse slaughter. We've scratched our heads and wondered why seemingly intelligent people would use the most illogical, ill conceived arguments and ridiculous euphemisms like "horse harvesting" to try to sway public opinion to embrace horse slaughter.

Time after time horse advocates have exposed the horrendous cruelty involved in the industry in ways that were completely indisputable. Yet, slaughter proponents steadfastly insist on calling the process "euthanasia" which of course means "good death", the very polar opposite of what the gruesome evidence shows.

Animal Agriculture organizations, from turkey growers to pork producers, have always been tacitly opposed to banning horse slaughter on the flimsy supposition that it would lead down a slippery slope toward the banning of all meat production.

Unlike slaughter supporters who throw out unsubstantiated statistics and comments, we are always under a microscope. We must have our facts, figures and sources straight before going to press. We have consistently had enough research and data to resink the Titanic but more often than not, we have been unable to break the stronghold on the press by our opponents.

That is until the drug issue came to light. We had warned of drug residues in US horses for years, but eventually food safety regulators in European Union (EU) came to realize that there was a huge hole in their system, and that thousands of contaminated horses were slipping into the EU. It took human food safety to finally provide an irrefutable reason why the slaughter of U.S. horses should be banned immediately.

Initially, all the propaganda and disinformation was about the innocuous preservation of horse slaughter for the large quantity breeders. The big support came from the American Quarter Horse Association, the largest breed registry with over 125,000 foals registered every year. The major driver of excess horses, or as our opponents have renamed them, "unwanted" horses, are the large breeders that produce hundreds of horses, sell a small portion and then cull the excess to slaughter. It is a never ending cycle that had to be protected and is a practice that is never addressed by slaughter proponents.

Then when the US horse slaughter plants were closed down the horse slaughter battle began to shift from a conflict within the horse community to a full-fledged proxy war with animal agriculture.

The first clue that slaughter supporters were switching strategies was the new argument that opponents of horse slaughter really wanted to bring down animal agriculture. Now, equine advocates were labeled PETA, and animal rights extremists, with some going as far as to call us "animal terrorists". No doubt, this was to garner support from food producers and ranchers to support a foreign meat business that had nothing to do with the horse industry.

Next, was the emergence of HumaneWatch, an organization frequently quoted by slaughter supporters, that is run by Rick Berman, dubbed Dr. Evil by 60 Minutes. Berman is a lobbyist and shill for corporations that oppose any type of animal welfare. Their sole purpose is to bash the *Humane Society of the United States* because of their successes in animal welfare for farm animals.

Finally, there was the "Summit of the Horse" meeting in Las Vegas earlier this year that featured a keynote speaker from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. The animal agriculture supporters of horse slaughter had been forced to come to the aid of their flailing allies on the horse slaughter front.

In a feckless attempt to throw up a smoke screen on the issue, the outspoken slaughter spokesperson, Sue Wallis, resorted to inventing her drug regulations and facts out of thin air. She declared phenylbutazone (bute) is safe in food animals after 30 days, ignoring that the FDA and European Union have banned bute in all food animals.

In the heat of the blog wars that followed, some ranchers attempted to bolster the Wallis argument by stating they often gave bute to their cattle! Their reasoning, to whatever degree reasoning might have existed, appeared to be that if food safety regulations are being flaunted by cattlemen, then these drug residues must be okay in horses.

Once the drug issues came to light, an unintended consequence emerged. Americans are becoming increasingly interested and suspicious about how their own meat is being produced. Some are asking why the EU bans our beef that is raised using growth enhancing steroids and/or antibiotics.

Perhaps this is the true "slippery slope" that the animal agriculture proponents were concerned about. Those who know how outrageously this safety issue has been covered up are now asking what might really be going on "behind the curtain" of our meat production.

Our issue has always been and remains solely horse slaughter but our opponents, in attempting to dismiss the drug issues in horses, now have taken this beyond horse owners. If the meat industry supporters of horse slaughter had any regard for food safety, why would they support the slaughter of an animal that is not raised or regulated in the U.S. as a food animal?

Slaughter proponents have not only backed themselves into a corner but have now painted themselves into that corner. They are stuck and the desperation is becoming quite humorous because it is they that brought food production into the mix. The disinformation in their slaughter handbooks has no answers on how to twist and spin food safety laws or explain why food producers support horse slaughter.

In light of all the push back from the European Union on U.S. horses, increased FDA authority and increased awareness on food safety, there should be no debate on whether or not horse slaughter should be banned.

A member of Equine Welfare Alliance and the food production industry, Diana Bodensteiner, stated it best, "Slaughter is food production. It is a serious, tightly regulated business. It is not the place we send unwanted cows, swine, sheep, and horses."

Today our horses are being slaughtered in Canada and Mexico, but there are plans in both countries to appease the EU by requiring horses to be electronically tracked from birth if they are to be slaughtered for human consumption. That will most probably be how American horses finally become protected against slaughter.

We now know the true unintended consequences of horse slaughter.

Equine Welfare Alliance is an umbrella organization representing 176 organizations and hundreds of individuals across the United States and 14 countries worldwide. The organization focuses its efforts on the welfare of all equines and the preservation of wild equids. www.equinewelfarealliance.org

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