

HORSE SLAUGHTER



ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE

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BETRAYING OUR EQUINE ALLY

Horses have served humans throughout history, carrying us on their backs, tilling our fields, drawing wagons and carriages, and enriching our lives as friends and companions. In the United States, horses have never been raised for human consumption, yet for decades, our horses have been bought and slaughtered by a predatory, foreign-owned industry for sale to high-end diners in Europe and Asia. In 2007, the slaughter of horses on US soil came to an end when a federal court ruling upheld a 1949 Texas law banning horse slaughter, and legislation was passed in Illinois banning the practice.



However, failure by the US Congress to pass bills such as the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act into law means that American horses are still being slaughtered for human consumption abroad. Tens of thousands are shipped to Mexico and Canada annually, where they are killed under barbaric conditions so their meat can continue to satisfy the palates of overseas diners in countries such as Italy, France, Belgium, and Japan.

Additionally, without a federal law, there remains the threat that horse slaughter plants may set up shop in states that have no laws against the practice. Since 2008, attempts to open horse slaughterhouses in New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wyoming, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas, Illinois, and Montana have been unsuccessful, but it is likely that horse slaughter proponents will try again in these states or elsewhere.

Ironically, while the most vocal opponents of the SAFE Act decry the closure of the domestic plants and subsequent increase in the export of horses for slaughter, some actively partner with the very individuals who are shipping our horses to Mexico and Canada.

While a handful of horses are purposely sold into slaughter by irresponsible owners, most arrive at the slaughterhouse via livestock auctions, where unsuspecting owners sell the animals to slaughterhouse middlemen known as “killer buyers.” Despite the fact that the US plants are no longer in operation, killer buyers continue to purchase and haul as many horses as possible from livestock auctions around the country to the slaughterhouses that have now relocated to Mexico and Canada. In fact, more horses have been slaughtered in each of the years after 2007—when the last US-based horse slaughter plant was closed—than were slaughtered annually in the years leading up to 2007.

Wild horses are also slaughtered, since a 2004 backdoor congressional rider engineered by Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT) gutted the protections afforded by the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. Now, the Bureau of Land Management, the agency responsible for protecting wild



Horse slaughter proponents claim that slaughter helps owners dispose of old or sick horses, but the slaughterhouses have said they want younger, healthier animals.

horses, must sell “excess” horses (those 10 years of age or older, or not adopted after three tries) at auction. As a result, wild horses are being removed from their range at an alarming rate and some have been sold for slaughter.

Although awareness has grown exponentially since AWI began the national campaign against horse slaughter, the horse meat trade is still relatively hidden from most Americans, and the industry wants to keep it that way. The operations manager of a Canadian horse slaughterhouse was quoted as saying to the *Edmonton Journal*, “Talking about horses is kind of a scary thing, especially in the West, where people think it’s more of a pet than protein. When anybody starts writing about horses, everybody gets up in arms. Every time we say anything about horse in the paper, there’s always an uproar, so I don’t want to talk about it.”

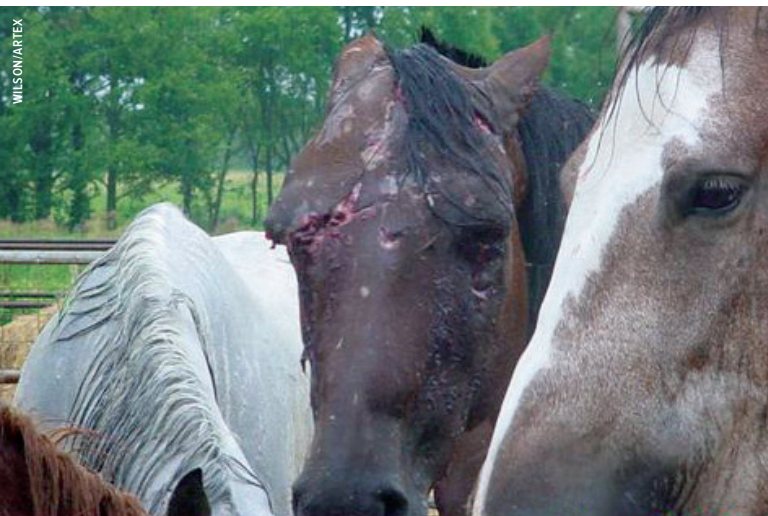
A BRUTAL DEATH

The suffering begins long before horses even reach the slaughterhouse. Conditions of transport are appalling, with horses regularly hauled to our domestic borders on journeys

lasting more than 24 hours. The horses are forced onto trailers and deprived of food, water, or rest, so the shippers can make as much profit as possible. Federal regulations governing the transport of horses to slaughter are so deficient that they allow the movement of blind horses, horses with broken legs, and heavily pregnant mares.

Upon arrival at the slaughterhouse, the suffering continues unabated. Horses can be left for long periods in tightly packed trailers, subjected to further extremes of heat and cold. In hot weather, their thirst is acute. Downed animals are unable to rise, and horses are offloaded using excessive force.

As first reported by AWI in 2002, when the horses are herded through the plant to slaughter, callous workers use fiberglass rods to poke and beat their faces, necks, backs, and legs as the animals are shoved through the facility and into the kill box. Subjected to overcrowding, deafening sounds, and the smell of blood, the horses become more and more desperate, exhibiting fear typical of “flight” behavior—pacing in prance-like movements with their ears pinned back against their heads and eyes wide open.



Horse transportation laws are so weak that, even after a man hauling 19 horses to slaughter was charged with animal cruelty, the USDA failed to take action. Just after this photo was taken, the horses were slaughtered.



HUMANE FARMING ASSOCIATION

Conditions over the border are even worse than those at the previously operational US plants. An investigation by the *San Antonio Express-News* revealed that the use of the “puntilla” knife to incapacitate horses prior to slaughter is common practice in Mexican slaughter plants, such as a facility owned by Beltex, which formerly operated in Texas.

Footage obtained by the paper shows horses being stabbed repeatedly in the neck with these knives prior to slaughter. Such a barbaric practice simply paralyzes the animals. They are still fully conscious at the start of the slaughter process, during which they are hung by a hind leg and have their throats slit before the bodies are butchered. Death, the final betrayal of these noble animals, is often protracted and excruciating.

In response, some advocate for restoration of horse slaughter in the United States, a position which ignores the cruelty inflicted on American horses right under the nose of grossly underfunded and highly inadequate USDA inspection programs. There is ample documentation from the USDA, private investigations, and first-hand observations by AWI staff to substantiate the inhumane treatment of horses at plants when they were operating in the United States, just as there is documentation of the inhumane treatment of horses at plants that are operating outside the country. The only solution is for horse slaughter to be banned here and American horses prevented from being shipped to slaughter in other countries.

DEBUNKING THE “UNWANTED HORSE” MYTH

In recent years, horse slaughter proponents have consistently fought adoption of the SAFE Act, claiming that there is a huge “unwanted horse” population in the United States. Those who advance this unsubstantiated claim, including the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Quarter Horse Association, and the Livestock Marketing Association, have lobbied Congress to block passage of the federal ban. Their premise is that slaughter improves horse welfare, offering a “humane” way to dispose of these animals—a “necessary evil” without which horses would be subjected to neglect, abandonment, and abuse.

In truth, no hard data exists to back up claims about a burgeoning population of “unwanted horses.” What is clear is that killer buyers working for the slaughterhouses are outbidding other buyers at auction because they have the financial incentive to do so. The market for slaughtered horses is set by the international demand for their meat in other countries, not by the number of supposedly unwanted horses.

Horse slaughter proponents claim that shutting down US plants has depressed the market for horses, resulting in over 100,000 unwanted horses in the United States and a concomitant increase in abuse, neglect, and abandonment.



Yet, more horses are slaughtered now than before the US plants closed, and the number is rising. According to the USDA, 125,000 American horses were exported to slaughterhouses in Canada and Mexico in 2015. How can closing US facilities depress the market for horses when demand from killer buyers continues? Such numbers directly undermine the argument put forth by slaughter proponents.

Thankfully, a truly humane veterinary organization has emerged to counter the bogus claims of these veterinary



ANNE RUSSEK

Horses rescued from slaughter are often severely neglected. Many individuals sending horses to slaughter feel no need to spend money to care for them in the end.



ANNE RUSSEK

After some basic care and proper diet, most horses rescued from slaughter can go on to lead healthy lives.

and industry organizations. Veterinarians for Equine Welfare (VEW) was founded by a group of leading veterinarians to help educate the public about horse slaughter from a veterinary position.

During a trip to meet with legislators in Washington, DC, VEW co-founder Dr. Nicholas Dodman said, “Horse owners currently have two options when their horse has reached the end of his or her trail: They can pay to do the right thing (re-home or euthanasia) or be paid to do the wrong thing (send to slaughter). A few thoughtless folks choose to do the latter, and it should not be an option.”

ILLEGALLY ACQUIRED HORSES

Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of our horses are stolen each year. Horse thieves make quick money by unloading illegally obtained horses to killer buyers and slaughterhouses. Slaughterhouses typically kill and process them so quickly that it is almost impossible to trace and recover stolen animals in time to save their lives. Who would imagine their stolen animal was hauled across the border to be slaughtered for meat?

The owners’ stories can be heartbreaking. Judy Taylor of Kentucky sought help in caring for her two beloved Appaloosa horses, Poco and PJ, due to her own serious health problems. At the recommendation of a friend, she contacted Lisa and Jeff Burgess. The couple agreed to take care of the animals with the understanding that, if they were unable to continue doing so, the horses would be returned to Judy. Despite this agreement, within seven days of receiving the horses, the Burgesses sold them to a known killer buyer. Soon after, Judy discovered what had happened and frantically searched for the horses acquired with fraudulent intentions.

Eventually, she learned the horrifying truth—her horses had been slaughtered for their meat. Although it could not bring back her horses, Taylor did successfully sue the Burgesses. The Kentucky Court of Appeals noted,

“The Burgesses’ conduct clearly rises to the level of being outrageous and intolerable in that it offends generally accepted standards of decency and morality, certainly a situation in which the recitation of the facts to an average member of the community would arouse his resentment against the actor, and lead him to exclaim, ‘Outrageous!’”

In another tragic case, a horse owner in northwest Oklahoma contacted AWI to report that her two pregnant mares were purchased by someone who in turn sold them for slaughter. “Nobody that works at the auction barn let me know who was buying,” she said. “I found out when I went to the office to ask how to notify the buyers so I could send them the breeding certificates.” When the staff hinted that no certificates would be needed, the owner suspected something might be wrong. By the time she located the buyers, the mares had already been sent to Mexico and slaughtered.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Support bills such as the SAFE Act, which would once and for all end both the shipment of American horses for slaughter abroad, and end the threat that horse slaughter plants will reopen in the United States. Until the US Congress passes this or a similar bill into law, show horses, racehorses, foals born as “byproducts” in the production of Premarin (a female hormone replacement drug), wild horses, burros, and family horses will all continue to fall prey to this detestable industry.





AWI spokesman and country music legend Willie Nelson greets one of the many rescued horses he has retired to his ranch in Luck, Texas.

In the meantime, do not sell your horse at an auction where killer buyers may operate. Consider donating your horse to a rescue organization or retirement farm; donating, selling, or leasing your horse to a therapeutic riding program; or selling the horse privately to an individual with proper references and a legally binding agreement that the horse will never be sold to slaughter. Humane euthanasia by a licensed veterinarian is preferable to cruel transport and slaughter.

Stolen horses may end up at the slaughterhouse. Please report any stolen horses to local and state authorities. Likewise, if you witness an abused or abandoned horse, please report the details to your local animal control authority for further investigation. Not only does such abuse and neglect require immediate attention for the obvious welfare reasons, but these horses are also at risk of being sold into slaughter by uncaring owners.

Help raise awareness concerning the issue of horse slaughter by writing letters to the editors of your local newspapers and any equine publications you read. You can contact your local media outlets through AWI's Compassion Index at www.compassionindex.org.



Animal Welfare Institute

Since 1951, AWI has been a leading voice for animals around the globe. Please join our efforts to reduce the suffering inflicted on animals by humans and sign up for AWI eAlerts to receive the latest news on what you can do to help us protect all animals: www.awionline.org/joinus.



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