

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 court ruling upheld a Texas law banning horse slaughter, and similar legislation was passed in Illinois.

However, failure by the US Congress to pass the American Horse Slaughter Prevention 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 the federal law, there remains the threat that horse slaughter plants may set up shop in states that have no laws against the practice. In the beginning of 2008, unsuccessful attempts were made to open a horse slaughterhouse

in South Dakota and overturn the Illinois ban. It is likely that pro-horse slaughter organizations will try again elsewhere in the United States, including Texas and Illinois.

Ironically, while the most vocal opponents of the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act decry the closure of the domestic plants and subsequent increase in the export of horses for slaughter, some actively partner with the very slaughterhouses that are shipping our horses to Mexico.

While a handful of horses are purposely sold into slaughter by irresponsible owners, most arrive at the slaughterhouse via livestock auction, 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.

Wild horses are also slaughtered, since a 2004 backdoor Congressional rider engineered by then-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 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 sold for slaughter. Sadly, the American Quarter Horse Association has hired former Senator Conrad Burns to lobby against the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act and other equine welfare measures.

Although awareness has grown exponentially in recent years, the horse meat trade is still relatively hidden from most Americans, and the industry wants to keep it that way. Warren Smith, 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



Amy Nelson

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



Dreamstime

anything about horse in the paper, there's always an uproar, so I don't want to talk about it."

Until the US Congress passes the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act into law, show horses, racehorses, foals born as "byproducts" of the Premarin® (a female hormone replacement drug) industry, wild horses, burros and family horses will all continue to fall prey to this detestable foreign-driven industry.

A BRUTAL DEATH

The suffering begins long before our 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. Deprived of food, water or rest, the horses are forced onto double-decked cattle trailers with ceilings so low that they injure their heads. Not only are these double-deckers inhumane, but they are also dangerous and have been involved in a number of tragic accidents.

The notorious "Wadsworth Crash" occurred in 2007 when a double-decker carrying 59 Belgian draft horses "blew through a stop light" and overturned in Illinois. For five hours, police officers, firefighters, local horse owners and other members of the community fought to free the horses from the mangled truck. By the time all the horses had been removed, nine had died, and another six later died because of the injuries they sustained.

In fact, federal regulations governing the transport of horses to slaughter are so deficient that they



Humane Farming Association

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.

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.

Conditions over the border are even worse than those at the previously operational US plants. A 2007 investigation by *The San Antonio News-Express* revealed that the use of the puntilla knife on horses prior to slaughter is common practice in Mexican slaughter plants, such as a facility currently owned by Beltex, formerly operating 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 animal. The horse is still fully conscious at the start of the slaughter process, during which he or she is hung by a hind leg, his or her throat slit and body butchered. Death, the final betrayal of these noble animals, is protracted and excruciating.

DEBUNKING THE "UNWANTED HORSE" MYTH

In recent years, pro-horse slaughter organizations and individuals have consistently fought adoption of the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, claiming that there is a huge "unwanted horse" population in the United States. Proponents of this unsubstantiated claim, including the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American



Wilson/ARTEX

Horse transportation laws are so weak that, nearly two years after a man hauling 19 horses to slaughter was charged with animal cruelty, the USDA has failed to resolve this situation. Just after this photo was taken, the horses were slaughtered.

Veterinary Medical Association and the American Quarter Horse Association (all members of the Horse Welfare Coalition, a group founded and led by the slaughterhouses and represented by former US Representative Charlie Stenholm of Texas) 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 slaughter horses is set by the international demand for their meat in other countries, not by the number of supposedly unwanted horses.

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



istockphoto

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. Successful charges were brought against 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 the Animal Welfare Institute 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.



Ginger Kathrens/The Cloud Foundation

The wild stallion Cloud, subject of two popular PBS specials and companion books, is at risk of round-up and slaughter because of a Congressional amendment that undermined the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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 frequently 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 on the issue of horse slaughter by writing letters to the editors of your local newspapers and any equine publications you read. Talk about the horrors of horse slaughter and the solution to this cruelty: passage of the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act. You can also help our campaign by distributing this brochure to others; extra copies are available from AWI upon request. Finally, contact your elected officials in the US Congress to let them know that you strongly support passage of the Act.



Therapeutic riding programs benefit children and horses.

ABOUT US

For over 57 years, AWI has been the leading voice for animals across the country and on Capitol Hill. Please join us in our ongoing campaigns to reduce the sum total of pain and fear inflicted on animals by humans. 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.



**Animal Welfare
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