



Myths and Facts Regarding Horse Slaughter

Myth: Ending domestic horse slaughter has destroyed the U.S. horse market and led to fewer options for disposal of horses, causing neglect and abandonment.

Fact: Horse neglect and abandonment cannot logically be attributed to the closure of U.S slaughter plants because the number of U.S. horses sent to slaughter has not decreased since domestic slaughter ceased in 2007. If the end of domestic horse slaughter had caused an increase in horse neglect/abandonment cases, the number of horses slaughtered would have decreased and horse neglect/abandonment cases would have increased. Neither has occurred. Any downturn in the horse market is clearly related to the economic downturn that occurred the same year that the last slaughter plant closed. Historically, all animals – dogs, cats, horses, and even farm animals raised for food – face greater chances of neglect in a poor economy.

Myth: The plants operated in the U.S. prior to 2007 were regulated and therefore offered a humane alternative to horse slaughter plants over the border.

Fact: It is telling that even at a time of intense public controversy and scrutiny of this industry, government documents and undercover footage demonstrate that cruelty was rampant in USDA-inspected slaughter plants. Footage shot at former U.S. horse slaughter plants exposed horrific suffering: Employees whipping horses in the face, pregnant mares giving birth on the killing floors, and many horses remaining conscious while shackled and hoisted by a rear leg to have their throats cut. USDA inspection documents and photos obtained from a USDA Freedom of Information Act request (FOIA Request 06-108) show horses with broken bones protruding from their bodies, eyeballs hanging by a thread of skin, and open wounds.

Myth: It is possible to conduct commercial horse slaughter in a humane manner.

Fact: Horse slaughter, whether in U.S. or foreign plants, was never and cannot be humane due to the nature of the industry and the unique biology of horses. Long distance transport leading to injuries is an inherent aspect of this industry because Americans will never create demand for it. Even if they did, the slaughter process cannot be done humanely for horses. The captive bolt method of stunning was not designed for horses, animals that have intense “fight or flight” responses and long necks that they toss when frightened. Their brains are also farther back in their skulls than those of cattle, making the target zone for stunning much smaller. These traits make accurate stunning very difficult. As a result, horses often endure repeated blows and sometimes remain conscious during dismemberment. Captive bolt was the method of stunning in horse slaughter plants in the U.S. in the past, and is the method horse slaughter proponents intend to use in the U.S. should horse slaughter plants reopen. The methods used to kill horses rarely result in quick, painless deaths. Horses with no other options should be humanely euthanized (which costs approximately the amount of one month’s keep for a horse) by a licensed veterinarian, rather than crowded onto a truck to be cruelly transported and then butchered. Horse slaughter is a brutal and terrifying end for animals raised to trust people and it is motivated by greed, not compassion. We should not allow our horses to be subjected to this tremendous cruelty within or beyond our borders.

Myth: Horse slaughter will have no negative financial impact on American taxpayers.

Fact: Subsidizing horse slaughter cruelty will divert precious financial resources away from American products. While authority to fund horse slaughter inspections was restored last year, no corresponding funds were allocated to oversee slaughter plant operations and to effectively regulate the transportation of slaughter-bound horses. The many millions of dollars necessary to conduct horse slaughter inspections would be diverted away from inspections of food items that Americans actually consume. The EU

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Myth: Horse slaughter is a form of humane euthanasia. ¶
Fact: Horse slaughter is the opposite of humane euthanasia. “Euthanasia” is defined as a gentle, painless death provided in order to prevent suffering. Slaughter is not euthanasia—it is a brutal and terrifying end for horses and is not humane. Horses are shipped for more than 24 hours at a time in crowded trucks without food, water, or rest. Pregnant mares, foals, injured horses, and blind horses endure the journey. Once they arrive, their suffering intensifies. The methods used to kill horses rarely result in quick, painless deaths. Horses with no other options should be humanely euthanized (which costs approximately the amount of one month’s keep for a horse) by a licensed veterinarian, rather than crowded onto a truck to be cruelly transported and then butchered. ¶

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is on the verge of tightening requirements for lifetime regulation of horses sent to slaughter, due to overwhelming evidence that drugs administered to American horses are toxic to humans. These new rules would require onerous and ever-evolving USDA oversight – at taxpayer expense – to ensure compliance. At a time when funding for many vital programs for Americans is being cut, it is outrageous that Congress would spend tax dollars on horse slaughter, a cruel practice that benefits only foreign interests.

Myth: Horsemeat is safe for human consumption.

Fact: U.S. horsemeat is dangerous to humans because of the unregulated administration of numerous toxic substances to horses before slaughter. In the U.S., horses are raised and treated as companion animals. This means that horses are not subject to USDA drug restrictions in place for food animals. The vast majority of horses destined for slaughter will have ingested, or been treated or injected with multiple chemical substances that are known to be dangerous to humans if eaten: untested on humans: or specifically prohibited for use in animals intended to be slaughtered for human consumption. Because of growing concern about the health threats of drug-laced American horsemeat, the European Union (EU), a primary purchaser of American horsemeat, may soon require that American horsemeat imported into the EU be accompanied by lifetime medical records verifying that the animal was never administered toxic drugs. The U.S. currently has no system to trace the medical history of horses.

Myth: The horsemeat scare in the U.K. is overblown – the levels of phenylbutazone (bute, known as “horse aspirin”) found in the horsemeat there are too low to be harmful.

Fact: The U.S. Federal Drug Administration does not recognize a “safe” level of exposure to bute in humans; that is why the drug is banned for use in food animals. The claims that the levels are “too low to be dangerous” have no basis in fact. Furthermore, bute is a known carcinogen with serious, long-term health effects. Additionally, bute is just one of a long and ever-expanding list of potentially toxic drugs regularly administered to horses. Bute, dewormer, fly spray – and hundreds more that are known to be toxic to humans when ingested.

Myth: The federal government can ensure the safety of horsemeat.

Fact: The USDA has no system in place to track horses’ lifetime medical histories. Testing random samples of horsemeat overlooks the fact that every single horse has a unique, unknown past. Unlike animals raised for food, horses do not spend their lives being prepared for the food chain. Every horse is a pet, riding companion, race horse, show pony, or work partner. Each may be a single patient to any number of vets, and be transferred by any number of owners, and has a unique life story. Relying on random-sample testing of horsemeat is inadequate at best and dangerous at worst.

Myth: Only legal drugs are given to racehorses and are always administered and recorded by licensed veterinarians.

Fact: Racehorses are given a variety of drugs that could be dangerous to humans. This includes cocaine, frog juice (also known as demorphan, which is a painkiller more powerful than morphine), cobra venom (a pain killer that is 40 times more powerful than morphine), phenylbutazone (“bute” – horse aspirin), as well as other stimulants, steroids, pain medications, anti-inflammatories and other chemicals used to enhance performance and mask injuries. The racing industry is grossly unpoliced, illegal doping occurs, and existing punishments are weak and rarely serve as deterrents. Food safety agencies have no means to test horsemeat for new substances such as demorphan, much less determine their toxicity to humans, therefore they can never confidently state that they’re conducting all the right tests to ensure that horsemeat is safe for human consumption. The cost to develop and continually refine such tests would be enormous and unending.

Myth: Horse slaughter plants could stimulate the local economy.

Fact: Horse slaughter plants have proven to be economic and environmental nightmares. These plants pollute local water, decrease property values, permeate the air with a foul stench, drain local economies, and damage the environment. The last three horse slaughter plants in the U.S. offered only a few low-income, dangerous jobs that did nothing to bolster local economies. Long before the plants closed in 2007, they had worn out their welcome. For example, in 2005, the city council of Kaufman, Texas, home to the Dallas Crown facility, voted unanimously to implement termination proceedings against the plant. Paula Bacon,

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Myth: Banning horse slaughter would result in the shipment of horses to Mexico and Canada under false pretenses¶

Fact: Under the bill, American horses could not legally be exported for slaughter. Individuals attempting to do so would be held criminally liable. The False Claims Act makes it illegal to falsify any information in statements made to the U.S. government. Further, any legislative change requires enforcement; the enforcement mechanism (the USDA and border agents) is already in place. Criminalizing the act of moving horses for slaughter will, at the very least, dramatically reduce the number of horses exported for slaughter. The animal protection community will continue its commitment to support funding for USDA’s enforcement efforts.

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Deleted: It isn’t just routine drugs we should worry about, but new, illegal drugs as well, and USDA has no way to keep up with the drug race associated with some horse competitions. An extensive investigation by the New York Times uncovered shocking evidence that race horses are routinely given illegal drugs and bizarre concoctions such as cocaine and cobra venom to make them run faster and to mask injury-related pain. The financial incentive to win at all costs is driving the market for developing more powerful stimulants, legal or otherwise. Just last summer a new drug surfaced: demorphan (“tree frog juice”) – an extract from South American tree frogs that when injected into horses acts a (...

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mayor of Kaufman stated, “As a community leader where we are directly impacted by the horse slaughter industry, I can assure you the economic development return to our community is negative. The foreign-owned companies profit at our expense -- it is time for them to go.” These foreign-owned horse slaughter plants were repeatedly fined for violations of local laws and for creating sewage overflows. The plants paid less annual local property taxes (\$7,500 for Dallas Crown) than average citizens in their communities. Even more shocking, Dallas Crown’s income tax records revealed that in 2005 the plant paid a total of \$5.00 in income tax. There is no import or export tariff on horsemeat and most, if not all, of the profits were sent back to the parent companies in France and Belgium. Attracting new business was difficult for communities burdened with the presence of a horse slaughter plant because of the related negative stigma. Real estate values also plummeted. The minimal financial contributions of horse slaughter facilities are vastly outweighed by the enormous economic and development-suppressing burden they present.

Myth: Banning horse slaughter undermines private property rights.

Fact: Private property rights do not grant owners the right to abuse their animals.

Every state has anti-cruelty laws that mandate protections for animals. Owners will still have ample legal options of reselling, donating, or euthanizing their horses. In fact, allowing horse slaughter facilitates violation of property rights by encouraging the theft of privately owned horses for sale to slaughter. When domestic horse slaughter plants were operating, horses were stolen out of pastures and barns every year for the horsemeat trade. When California banned horse slaughter in 1998, the horse theft rate dropped 34%. Last year, Pennsylvania newspapers reported on a woman who, portraying herself as a rescuer who would help re-home individuals’ horses, actually sold more than 100 horses to slaughter – a grisly end that their former owners never intended for them.

Myth: A prohibition on horse slaughter could lead to a ban on beef, pork and poultry production by legitimizing efforts to end consumption of food derived from any animal.

Fact: Americans don't eat horses and, unlike cows, pigs, and chickens, we don't breed them for human consumption.

Last year, more than 12 billion animals were bred and raised as food animals and consumed in America. It is irrational and misleading to assert that preventing horse slaughter for human consumption (a market that doesn’t even exist in the U.S.) could possibly lead to a ban on hamburgers. Horses simply are not food animals in America. The American public overwhelmingly supports a ban on horse slaughter precisely because horses have a special place in our heritage and they are beloved companions to millions today.

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Fact: There is no evidence that a ban on horse slaughter will result in a carcass disposal crisis. Roughly 900,000 horses die annually in the U.S. and are safely disposed of by means other than slaughter. Rendering, incineration, and burial are options, depending on local laws. More than one million cattle die on the farm each year—with no resulting environmental hazards. ¶

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