



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES



Questions and Answers about Horse Slaughter

Question: Is it possible to conduct commercial horse slaughter in a humane manner?

Answer: No. 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. Slaughter is a brutal and terrifying end for horses and is not humane. Horses are shipped for more than 24 hours at a time without food, water, or rest in crowded trucks in which the animals are often seriously injured or killed in transit. Horses are skittish by nature due to their heightened fight or flight response, which makes accurate stunning difficult. As a result, horses often endure repeated blows and sometimes remain conscious during dismemberment; this is rarely a quick, painless death. Before the last domestic plant closed in 2007, the USDA documented in the slaughter pipeline rampant cruelty violations and severe injuries to horses, including broken bones protruding from their bodies, eyeballs hanging by a thread of skin, and gaping open wounds. The answer is not to return to subjecting our horses to abuse and unacceptable conditions at plants in the U.S., but to ban horse slaughter and the export of horses for slaughter altogether and provide our horses with a decent life and, when necessary, a humane death.



Question: Will horse slaughter have a negative financial impact on American taxpayers?

Answer: Yes. Subsidizing horse slaughter cruelty will divert precious financial resources away from American products and food safety. The authority to fund horse slaughter inspections was restored last year, and the USDA has been asked to process horse slaughter applications to provide inspection of horse slaughter facilities. The many millions of tax dollars necessary to conduct horse slaughter inspections would be diverted away from food safety programs in place to protect Americans, to enable a practice that 80% of the American public opposes. 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.

Question: Is horsemeat safe for human consumption?

Answer: No. 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, not as food-producing animals. Unlike animals raised for food, 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, untested on humans, or specifically prohibited for use in animals raised for human consumption. Because of concerns about the health threats of drug-laced horsemeat, the European Union (EU), a primary importer of North American horsemeat, requires that horses presented for slaughter at EU approved plants be accompanied by medical records verifying that the animal was never administered toxic drugs. Horses are gathered from random sources at various stages in their life, and there is no system in the U.S. to track medications and veterinary treatments given to horses to ensure that their meat is safe for human consumption.

Question: Can the federal government ensure the safety of horsemeat?

Answer: No. The USDA has no system in place to track horses' lifetime medical histories, and the reputation of the entire U.S. meat industry is at risk. 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, 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.



Question: Has ending domestic horse slaughter damaged the U.S. horse market and led to fewer options for disposal of horses, causing neglect and abandonment?

Answer: No. 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. Horses are still being sent to slaughter, across our borders in Canada and Mexico. The slaughter option still exists, so any increase in neglect or abandonment can only be attributed to other economic factors. Any downturn in the horse market is clearly related to the economic downturn that began the same year that the last slaughter plant closed and continues today. Historically, all animals – dogs, cats, horses, and even farm animals raised for food – face greater chances of neglect in a poor economy.

Question: Are there any other ways to address an overpopulation of horses?

Answer: Yes. There are several ways to address homeless horse issues. We can limit overbreeding, provide shelter, and expand adoption work. Over 140,000 horses went to slaughter last year alone, but not every horse going to slaughter needs to go to rescue, and the vast majority would be rehomed. The USDA documented that 92.3% of horses are in good condition and are able to live out a productive life. These horses would be sold, donated, or otherwise rehomed; however, kill buyers regularly outbid legitimate horse owners and rescues at auctions. Using USDA's finding, the number of horses sent to slaughter that may require humane euthanasia is a fraction of a percent of the entire horse population. The idea of slaughtering companion animals is unacceptable to the American people and will never be embraced. A 2012 national poll found that 80% of Americans support a ban on horse slaughter for human consumption. There are countries who consume dogs, cats, and other pets as food, but we do not allow our dogs and cats to be exported for food purposes, even though there is a well-documented overpopulation issue to contend with for those animals. Horse slaughter enables and perpetuates overbreeding, neglect, and irresponsibility. As long as slaughter is an outlet for breeders to sell their excess horses, they will be rewarded – and continue. Horse slaughter is purely a function of supply and demand – not a disposal service.

Question: Will horse slaughter plants stimulate the local economy?

Answer: No. Horse slaughter plants have proven to be economic and environmental nightmares for the communities that host them. 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, 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." 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.