

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 (per a 2011 GAO Study).

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 to have decreased and horse neglect/abandonment cases would have to have increased. Neither has occurred. Historically, economic and weather patterns have a positive or negative impact on animal welfare and all animals – dogs, cats, horses, and even farm animals raised for food – face greater chances of neglect in a poor economy. A review of the GAO report, entitled **An Economic Assessment of GAO’s 2011 Study of the Impact of U.S. Horse Slaughter Plant Closures on the Horse Industry** by Cornell economist Allen Rosenfeld, Ph.D. released June 11, 2013, highlights significant flaws in the GAO report, including inconsistencies with the reality of slaughter horse buyers’ costs and the failure to include in their model important variables that reflect basic economic principles and the economic realities of the horse market. The conclusions of this examination of the GAO report are as follows: 1) estimates of the impact of the closures on horse prices in the GAO study are questionable at best; 2) those estimates should not be relied on by policy makers and the public in debates about policies affecting the U.S. horse market; and 3) whether the closure of domestic horse slaughter plants in 2007 has had a significant impact on horse prices and the well-being of the U.S. horse industry remains an open question, and, if it has, that impact appears to be minor. (full study: www.aspca.org/gaostudy)

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 long distances 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.

Myth: The foreign-owned plants in the U.S. were regulated and therefore offered a humane alternative to horse slaughter plants over the border.

Fact: It was 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, horses who flipped over backward and were injured due to rough and abusive handling, 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, is the most common method used at Mexican and Canadian plants where American horses are now shipped, and is the method horse slaughter proponents intend to use in the U.S. should horse slaughter plants reopen. 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: It would be better to allow U.S. plants to operate because they could be regulated for humaneness and would be better than exporting horses to Mexican and Canadian slaughterhouses.

FACT: Horse slaughter, whether in U.S. or foreign plants, was never and cannot be humane, and Americans are overwhelmingly opposed to the practice. This myth sounds a lot like the argument that we should bring child labor back to U.S. soil so we can regulate it. That doesn't make sense, given that we do not believe this is an acceptable practice. Even when horse slaughter plants were operating in the U.S., thousands of American horses were sent to Mexico and Canada for slaughter by these same methods every year. In 2006 when all three plants in the U.S. were operating, more than 37,000 horses were exported for slaughter. The plants located within the U.S. provided no guarantee of decent treatment and transport to those plants was just as agonizing – even though this issue was intensely controversial and those plants were under serious scrutiny. HSUS undercover footage shows horses being whipped, abused and injured while herded through holding pens, and ultimately hit multiple times with the captive bolt device, still kicking and thrashing while hoisted for their throats to be slit. Since the closure of the plants in the U.S., documents and photos released from the agency further demonstrate how very inhumane the plants in the US were, despite assurances from pro-slaughter organizations. See here http://www.hsus.org/horses_equines/horse_slaughter/new_photos_expose_brutality.html for more on how regulation cannot make horse slaughter humane. USDA records also document repeated incidents of horses denied water, horses whipped in the face, horses hit with electric prods, and horses who flipped over backward and were injured due to rough and abusive handling. Many incidents of heavily pregnant mares giving birth to foals on the killing floor have been documented. 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 decent death.

MYTH: We don't have any other way of addressing an overpopulation of horses.

FACT: There are several ways to address homeless horse issues. We can

- 1) limit overbreeding,**
- 2) provide shelter and**
- 3) expand adoption work.**

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 American voters support a ban on horse slaughter for human consumption. There are countries who consume dogs and cats as food, but we do not allow their export for food purposes, even though there is a well-documented overpopulation issue to contend with for those animals. Horses are one of the most manageable species we deal with – we are able to completely control their numbers and we are also able to rehome them or euthanize them, if other humane options are not possible. They generally are not stray animals.

Myth: Tribes need U.S. taxpayers to fund slaughterhouses.

Fact: Supporting funding limitation has no bearing on tribes who claim they have too many horses. The question of whether tax dollars should be allocated to subsidize horse slaughter operations in the U.S. is a separate issue. If tribes wish to manage horses via slaughter, even though it is an inhumane approach, it is currently an available option and will be even if the funding limitation is adopted. Tribes who do not want to slaughter their horses can use gelding, contraception, sales and donation as humane options for controlling their herd numbers. **Many great tribal leaders support the funding limitation**, including Paul Crane Tohlakai (Dineh Elder/and Horseman, Navajo Reservation), Chief David Bald Eagle (Chief of the Minikoju Band of the Cheyenne River Tribe Lakota Indians, First Chief of the United Indigenous Nations of The Americas), Chief Arvol Looking Horse (19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe, Spiritual Leader of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Nation), and Rudy Al James (Secretary-General of the United Indigenous Nations, Spokesman for the Council of the Kuiu Kwaan, Lead Judge of the combined Court of Thlingit Law, Member of the Board of Governors of The International Human Right Association of American Minorities (a United Nations NGO with Roster Status)). Additionally, on April 30, 2104, a historic agreement was struck between the Navajo Nation and Governor Bill Richardson on behalf of the Foundation for the Protection of New Mexico Wildlife. This agreement clearly states the Navajo belief that horse slaughter is inhumane.

MYTH: We have no other options, in the immediate future, for the horses currently going to slaughter each year.

FACT: If we banned horse slaughter today, the vast majority of those horses will go directly on to good homes from the same auctions where kill buyers currently are outbidding legitimate owners. USDA found that more than 92% of horses sent to slaughter are in good condition so most will go on to good homes. Many good owners and rescue operations are unable to compete with slaughter buyers at their local auctions. Using USDA's finding, only a tiny fraction (~7000-12,000 horses based on recent years) of the horse population will require the help of equine sanctuaries or humane euthanasia. That is less than 1/1,000th of the entire horse population. Horse slaughter is purely a function of supply and demand – not a disposal service for our horse community.

Historic View of Slaughter Numbers Tells the Story: The annual figure of American horses sent to slaughter has been as high as 412,000 in 1990 and as low as 64,000 ten years later with no resulting oversupply of horses. The current figure of 125,000 represents 1% of the entire U.S. horse population and can easily be reabsorbed into good homes. Not every horse currently going to slaughter will need to be placed with a rescue. USDA documents that 92.3% of all horses sent to slaughter are in good condition and therefore able to live out productive lives. Every week, kill buyers attend American auctions and outbid legitimate horse owners to fill their contracts with foreign-owned plants. The vast majority would be sold to a new owner and others would be kept longer. For the small number unable to find a home or enjoy a good quality of life, a licensed veterinarian can provide humane euthanasia for the same cost as one month's care for that horse. As a safety net, there are approximately 700 horse rescue organizations across the country, with new ones forming all the time. The organizations leading the charge to ban horse slaughter are the same organizations actively working to provide humane solutions for horses.

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 in 2011, no corresponding funds were allocated to oversee slaughter plant operations and to effectively regulate the transportation of slaughter-bound horses. Funds necessary to conduct horse slaughter inspections would be diverted from inspections of food items that Americans actually consume. Going further, the USDA announced that it would be moving forward with processing permits for domestic horse slaughter plants. At a time when the nation is focused on fiscal responsibility, it is outrageous that Congress would spend tax dollars on horse slaughter, a cruel practice that benefits only foreign interests.

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.

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. Horses are routinely administered medicines that are toxic to humans - medicines banned for use in animals raised 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, banned the import of horsemeat from Mexico, and issued an audit of Canadian plants expressing similar concerns that American horsemeat is not accompanied by lifetime medical records verifying that the animal was never administered toxic drugs. The U.S. currently has no means to trace the medical history of horses.

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

Fact: The 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. Bute is known to have serious, long-term health effects in people. 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: Drugs given to race horses are pharmaceutical grade and administered by licensed veterinarians.

Fact: Because many horses sold to slaughter come from our nation's race tracks, regulators don't know what to test for, and consumers don't know what they are eating. 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. Recently, a new drug surfaced: dermorphin ("tree frog juice") – an extract from South American tree frogs that when injected into horses acts as a painkiller 40 times more powerful than morphine. Food safety agencies have no means to test horsemeat for new substances such as dermorphin, 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: Simply stopping the administration of prohibited drugs to horses will make horsemeat safe for human consumption.

Fact: While each American horse has its own life story, they are all raised for pleasure or work, and are medically treated to keep them in shape for those tasks. To relieve aches and pains associated with work, competition, and companionship, horses are routinely administered bute ("horse aspirin") – a drug prohibited from being given to animals destined for human consumption. Dewormers, fly sprays, etc., serve the same purpose: to keep horses healthy. It is entirely unrealistic to think that horse owners would be willing to stop using the array of products that contain substances banned for human consumption.

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, 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: Ending horse slaughter will cause environmental harm because so many horse carcasses will be in need of disposal.

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.

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 would create a precedent to ban 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. More than 9 billion animals on average in recent years have been 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.