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2012 American Equine Summit

EQUINE EXPERTS UNITE TO BAN

HORSE SLAUGHTER

by Kathy Anderson | photo by Lucki Schotz

A

s a spring breeze ruffled their manes, three horses at the Equine Advocates Rescue & Sanctuary in Chatham, N.Y., watched a long line of cars, many with out-of-state license plates, drive by their pasture. Bobby

II, a former New York City carriage horse, was rescued from slaughter; Bridgette, a Shetland pony, was rescued from an animal park; and Abby, a Belgian Draft horse, was saved from a Canadian slaughter auction.

From as far west as California and as far south as Florida, horse welfare advocates came to the 2012 American Equine Summit at the Equine Advocates Rescue & Sanctuary at the end of March to discuss vital issues facing America's equines, including the threat of horse slaughter returning to the United States and the transport of horses to other countries for the purpose of slaughter.

"The summit far exceeded our expectations," said Susan Wagner, president and founder of Equine Advocates and host of the

summit. "It was riveting and compelling to have this many equally dedicated speakers in one place to discuss these issues."

The diverse list of speakers included keynote speaker Ron Delsener, a concert promoter and horse lover; Cathleen Doyle, former head of the California Equine Council; John Holland, president of the Equine Welfare Alliance; Dr. Kraig J. Kulikowski, DVM; Katia Louise, director of the documentary film *Saving America's Horses—A Nation Betrayed*; Victoria McCullough, who helped pass Florida's Equine Protection Act of 2010; Jo Anne Normile of Saving Baby Equine Charity and founder of CANTER, a nonprofit that tries to place ex-thoroughbreds; and Paula Bacon, former mayor of

“Horses are subjected to intense suffering and abuse through transport and slaughter over the border. Undercover footage shows live horses being dragged, whipped, and crammed into trucks whose interiors were 110 degrees. Horses are often shipped for more than 24 hours at a time in crowded double-deck cattle trucks without food, water, or rest. Pregnant mares, foals, injured horses, and even blind horses must endure the journey.”

Kaufman, Texas, who led the fight to close Dallas Crown, a horse slaughterhouse operating in Kaufman.

Horse slaughter for human consumption was banned in the United States in 2007. But “unwanted” horses are still being transported to Canada and Mexico for slaughter and their meat exported to Europe and Asia, where it is considered a delicacy.

In November 2011, the Senate, the House of Representatives, and President Obama signed H.R. 2112, allowing commercial horse slaughter for human consumption to be legal again in the United States. Currently, Missouri, Oregon, and Tennessee are trying to reopen horse slaughter plants.

Each day at the summit, a hundred attendees, including lawmakers and members of the press, heard speakers address the problems and solutions facing the US horse population and America’s responsibility for

their stewardship.

Kicking off the summit, Delsener called the return of horse slaughter in the United States “a black eye on our country.”

According to the Humane Society’s Facts About Horse Slaughter, “Horses are subjected to intense suffering and abuse through transport and slaughter over the border. Undercover footage shows live horses being dragged, whipped, and crammed into trucks whose interiors were 110 degrees. Horses are often shipped for more than 24 hours at a time in crowded double-deck cattle trucks without food, water, or rest. Pregnant mares, foals, injured horses, and even blind horses must endure the journey.”

The Humane Society’s fact sheet describes the horses’ inhumane treatment in Mexican and Canadian slaughter plants. “Horses are stabbed multiple times in the neck with a ‘puntilla knife’ to sever their spinal cords. This is not a stunning method—it paralyzes, leaving the horse twitching on the ground, unable to move or breathe. They are hoisted, bled out, and dismembered, often while still conscious.”

Normile is the principal of Normile Racehorse Protection Consulting, an organization that assists legislators, legal firms, filmmakers, the media, and rescue and humane organizations on all aspects of racing pertaining to the welfare of the thoroughbred racehorse. She discussed the results of a study she coauthored on the slaughter of thoroughbreds.

“Our study indicates that for every 10 thoroughbred foals born and registered with the Jockey Club, seven other thoroughbreds will die on a slaughterhouse floor. Once a thoroughbred enters the starting gate, odds are that the finish line will be a slaughterhouse,” said Normile. Thoroughbred horses are the second-largest breed after quarter horses that are sent to slaughter, she added.

McCullough spoke about the passage in Florida of the Equine Protection Act of 2010, which makes it a felony to abuse or slaughter a horse.

Louise, an award-winning documentary filmmaker, screened and discussed her film *Saving America’s Horses—A Nation Betrayed*, an emotional depiction of the plight of American horses and slaughter.

Kulikowski, a licensed equine practitioner and member of the American Equine Practitioners Association and the American Veterinary Medical Association—organizations that are pro-slaughter—discussed euthanasia as an alternative to violent slaughter.

Dr. Caroline Betts, PhD, an associate professor of economics at the University of Southern California, and former US Congressman John Sweeney (R-NY), the primary sponsor of H.R. 503, the House version of the 2006 American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, discussed flaws and discrepancies in the 2011 GAO (Government Accountability Office) report on the closings of horse slaughterhouses in the US. This report was the basis for the recent passage of H.R. 2112.

After reviewing the GAO report, Betts “ripped it to threads,” stating there was no basis for the GAO claims. Sweeney identified the opponents of the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act as the agricultural and cattle industry and the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA.) He described how these groups managed to block its passage in the Senate, what tactics they used, and what to expect from these opponents today in the antislaughter campaign.

Doyle joined the summit via video. She conceived and spearheaded the passage of California’s historic Save the Horses “Proposition 6,” the 1998 initiative that banned the slaughter of California horses for human

Continued on page 104

Advocating for Change



Clockwise from top:

Susan Wagner and John Sweeney,
JoAnne Normile, Ron Delsener.
Photography by Glen Davenport



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"Equine Experts Unite..." continued from page 101

consumption and the possession or sale of horsemeat.

Doyle shared her grass-roots campaign efforts of gathering 740,000 signatures and winning the largest percentage of votes (60 percent) of any California animal protection initiative to date. When people are able to sell a horse for money, horse theft rises, Doyle noted. "Horse slaughter subsidizes overbreeding, horse theft, and the unlawful extermination of our wild mustangs," she said. California law enforcement agencies supported Proposition 6 because of the difficulty in prosecuting horse thieves because of a lack of disclosure on the part of the slaughter agents, she added.

Bacon spoke about the economics and environmental impact a horse slaughterhouse has on a town. As mayor of Kaufman, Texas, from 2003 to 2007, Bacon helped shut down Dallas Crown, a horse slaughterhouse owned by the Belgian meat packer Chevedeco.

Bacon told the summit that horse blood contaminated the local water supply; horses have almost twice as much blood as cattle and their blood contains a variety of drugs legally banned for animals in the food chain. Among the drugs causing significant health concerns are several antibiotics that horses routinely get in worming paste, she said.

The slaughterhouse was in constant violation of environmental laws, choked the expensive wastewater treatment facility, and threatened expensive infrastructure, said Bacon. "At that time, there was literally blood coming up in people's bathtubs and toilets. As recently as 2005, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality investigated complaints about water safety and found that backflow-prevention requirements, that prevent things like blood coming into the sinks, tubs, and toilets of homes and business, were not in place."

The economics of horse slaughter don't add up, she said, describing "poor pay and dangerous work for 42 workers. All three plants operating in the US in 2006 employed no more than 178 workers total in jobs most Americans do not want," she added. "Environmental violations were the same in other communities: They did not comply with the laws."

Slaughter advocates refer to the problem of "unwanted horses" abandoned by their owners in a bad economy. Wagner, the summit host, refers to them as "inconvenient horses," horses that are abandoned by irresponsible owners or horses that no longer serve their purpose and must be discarded. "Overbreeding and the easy access to selling horses for their meat has contributed to the problem," she added.

"The AQHA is well served by horse slaughter," said Bacon. "Their primary income stream is registration, so the more the merrier, and overbreeding works for them. Horse slaughter is essential to such a business model, getting rid of a horse like it's a Chevrolet. AQHA spends lots of money and effort lobbying for horse slaughter, but they are a business group, not a humane organization," she added.

Holland of Equine Welfare Alliance reiterated that the solution for "unwanted horses" is euthanasia.

"Over 80 percent of Americans oppose horse slaughter, according to recent polls," said Wagner. "Our goal is to empower these '80-percenters' to make their voices heard in Congress, urging their representatives to pass legislation to stop this horrendous practice."

By bringing together these experts, their knowledge, and their singleness of purpose, the summit generated positive forward momentum, said Wagner. "We now have a campaign," she said. "And we have the tools to take this campaign to stop horse slaughter and transport to the next level." ★