

Post-Dispatch Endorses Horse Slaughter - The Alliance Responds

Posted July 11, 2013

St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

FAIR:

That may account for some of the hue and cry over the likelihood that federal regulators will soon approve horse slaughtering at Rains Natural Meats of Gallatin, in northwest Missouri. Regulators recently issued permits for similar facilities in Iowa and New Mexico.

The argument posed by Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., the top Republican on the Senate agriculture spending subcommittee, carries some weight. Mr. Blunt says slaughter is a humane solution for unwanted horses, and that a slaughtering facility brings potential jobs.

Congress essentially banned horse slaughter in 2005 when it eliminated funding for inspections by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Processing plants that are not inspected by the USDA cannot ship meat across state lines.

When the ban was reversed in 2011, Mr. Blunt supported it, saying the ban had led to an increase in abandoned and neglected horses in Missouri and elsewhere.

David Rains, vice president of Rains Natural Meats, says he runs a small family operation and plans to operate a humane plant with tight testing standards. He says there is a domestic and foreign market for horse meat for human and animal consumption.

The animals will be killed with a .410-gauge shotgun slug instead of the captive-bolt used to stun cattle and other livestock before slaughter.

Eating horse meat is acceptable in some countries, mostly in Europe and Asia, but taboo in others. In the United States, we think of horses as pets and work animals, not dinner.

A well-run horse slaughtering plant with regular inspections may produce something many of us don't want to think about and certainly wouldn't eat. But there are people who don't want to think about cow, pig or lamb slaughtering, either.

As it stands, unwanted horses in the United States are frequently trucked to Mexico for slaughter. A shotgun slug at a small plant in northwest Missouri would be a quicker and less stressful end for a work-weary animal that deserves humane treatment.

– Deborah Peterson

The Alliance Responds:

I think it is ironic that the Post-Dispatch endorses horse slaughter for Missouri two weeks after the Kansas City Star did an expose showing that the USDA can't sufficiently regulate slaughter plants for cows and pigs. The endorsement comes only one month after the federal Office of Inspector General documented serious violations of the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA) at slaughter plants across the country. The Inspector General reported that USDA did not take appropriate enforcement actions for violations of the HMSA and that USDA "could not ensure humane handling of swine."

While "humane" slaughter is questionable for pigs and cows, it is even more problematic for horses that, by their very nature, are vastly different from other commonly slaughtered animals. Due to their temperament, horses are not suited to be closely confined in large groups such as cows and hogs often endure when they are transported for slaughter. In such situations, horses will often fight resulting in injuries from being kicked, bitten, or even trampled.

Even the systems at the plants are geared towards general farm animals and don't take into account the skittish nature of horses. Horses are much more excitable than other livestock and are more likely to panic in tight quarters commonly experienced at slaughter facilities. Horses become very agitated when prodded as they are moved down alleyways to the "kill box" and many incur injuries from slipping and sliding resulting in dangerous falls. Horses are more difficult to shoot or place a penetrating bolt into their forehead as horses are more high strung and move their heads much more than docile hogs or cattle moving down the line.

The industry proudly claims that 95% of the horses are rendered unconscious in the "kill box." With hundreds of horses being slaughtered per day, even if the industry's claim is accurate, it would still leave dozens of horses every day leaving the "kill box" to be bled out and skinned alive.

There are absolutely no statistics to document the claim that there are more unwanted horses since horse slaughter was halted in the state. I hope the Post-Dispatch doesn't next endorse the slaughtering of dogs and shipping their meat overseas in an effort to solve the pet overpopulation problem.

Bob Baker
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<http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/24601-0001-41.pdf>