

Presentation by Susan Wagner
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www.equineadvocates.org
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INTRO

Hello, everyone. It's such a pleasure and a privilege to be here. My name is Susan Wagner; I am the president of Equine Advocates, a national non-profit equine protection organization based in NY which I founded in 1996. We are one of the few all equine organizations in this country which focuses both on advocacy work and horse rescue. We operate from a 140-acre Equine Sanctuary and Humane Education Center in Chatham, NY which is currently home to 82 equines, an alpaca, two pygmy goats & two barn cats. We also have 12 horses currently in foster care.

I just want to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Ann Marini, John Holland and Vicki Tobin of the Equine Welfare Alliance, Laura Allen of the Animal Law Coalition, RT Fitch and everyone else involved in organizing this important conference. You have succeeded in getting many of the best people involved in equine protection ever assembled in one place to discuss vital issues affecting equines, but horse slaughter, which is the common denominator for every aspect of the horse industry will be the primary focus at this conference and rightly so.

I'd like to start by showing a short film that was produced about our organization in 2009. All of the information is current, except for one part where I express my hope for anti-horse slaughter legislation to be passed during the 111th Congress. That as we all know did not happen, but we are now into the 112th Congress with two new bills introduced thanks to Senators Landrieu & Graham and Representatives Burton & Schakowsky.

This film will give you an idea of who we are and what we do, but also what we stand for. In addition, it will set the stage for the points I would like to make and focus on at this conference. Thank you.

FILM SHOWN (13 minutes)

Back in 1994, I wrote a pamphlet entitled, **HORSE SLAUGHTER - AN AMERICAN DISGRACE**. I've used that phrase many times since, as I believe that is the best way to describe the unspeakable, ghastly practice which is horse slaughter.

I started Equine Advocates over 15 years ago because of a horse I rescued from slaughter three years before in 1993. That rescue literally changed my life. I am sure that many of you here may have also had an epiphany involving horses that suddenly changed the direction of your lives. I spent 15 years working in the racing industry and then five years working for a zoological institution from which I rescued that wonderful horse...Then in 1994 while working for a non-profit animal group in NY, I found myself really wanting to do something to end horse slaughter. It became the focus of what I wanted to do because I felt so strongly about it...So I eventually spoke with someone in California who ran a horse rescue group who said, "Do you know Cathleen Doyle?...Because she's already doing it."...so I immediately got touch with Cathleen and found out that she was spear-heading the campaign for the passage of Proposition 6, the first state initiative in the nation that would ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption in California. I have to say that I will never forget Election Night in Los Angeles, Tuesday, November 3rd, 1998. We were all in a small reception room at the Biltmore Hotel where many candidates running for office were also awaiting the election returns.

When we heard that "Prop 6" had passed by 60% of the vote, there was elation unlike anything I had ever experienced....And in that room, we all just looked at each other because we all had the same thought which was that very famous saying, "As California goes, so goes the nation..."...But it was not to be - at least not yet. Nearly 13 years have now gone by since that historic initiative passed and we still do not have a federal law banning horse slaughter. There are many reasons as to why that has not happened. In California, the issue was very simple to understand. Cathleen's strategy was brilliant because it was the truth and she kept it simple. The focus of her successful campaign was the **Humane Euthanasia of Sporting, Recreational Non-food Animals versus Slaughter. Period!** There was no talk of food because we don't eat horses in this country. Therefore this was not a food issue.

There was no talk of rescue because 100,000 horses were not going to be rescued every year. That can't be done - there simply are not enough homes....so she promoted humanely euthanizing equines just as we do for our other favored animals like dogs and cats - that was the way she focused her campaign...And it worked! She understood that this was a cultural issue and that's how she positioned it. **That simple and clear winning strategy has not been duplicated since to try to pass the federal bill and it should have been!**

There is a notion which I have recently heard now not once, not twice, but actually three times this year by caring people within the Thoroughbred industry and by a recreational horse owner that somehow those opposed to horse slaughter are also opposed to humane euthanasia..."...**So what are we supposed to do?**" they each asked me in their own way. I, of course was shocked because I thought our side's position was clear in that we favored humane euthanasia as opposed to sending horses to slaughter...And I could only think that the opposition has now succeeded in convincing *some* people that opposing humane euthanasia is also our position.

We have to change that and make it clear that is NOT THE CASE! Obviously, for us as a rescue group, humane euthanasia is a last resort because we're not breeding horses - we're rescuing them, so we are not adding to the population. The only time we have foals born at the sanctuary is when we rescue pregnant mares and we've have done that many times over the years, especially with saving slaughter-bound Canadian PMU mares and miniature horses and donkeys that were used as breeding stock at petting zoos and tourist attractions. So I feel strongly that what **WE ALL MUST DO** going forward as a coalition, as humane groups, advocacy groups and as individuals is that we must make it **CRYSTAL CLEAR**, that every horse cannot be rescued and that humane euthanasia, meaning a that lethal injection as administered by a licensed veterinary, is always a preferred option to slaughter for an equine who has no home or guardian to care for the animal. For some reason, there has been reluctance by some in this movement to discuss and encourage humane euthanasia as an option and I strongly believe that that reluctance has seriously harmed our effort.

This is not a *kill versus no kill shelter issue*. **Horses go to slaughter - dogs and cats do not.** The only way to humanely protect equines from the fate of a horrendous death in a slaughterhouse is to promote humane euthanasia as one of several humane alternatives to slaughter.

Back in 2007, I traveled to Washington, D.C. to research and conduct interviews for an article I was writing called, "The Politics of Horse Slaughter." Even then, I was shocked by one member of Congress who was strongly against horse slaughter, but did not, in my opinion, understand the issue at all. That representative honestly thought all the horses were going to be rescued. No wonder we have not been successful when some of the very people who are trying to pass our bill have no real understanding of the issue.

If there is anything that we accomplish at this conference, it is that we must create and go forward with a uniform platform that is clear, concise and which leaves no doubt what our position is with regard to horse slaughter and the disposition of non-food animal carcasses which includes horses, dogs and cats. Cathleen Doyle created this nearly perfect model in California in 1998, but instead of moving forward on a federal level with the same winning strategy, the debate shifted from *Humane Euthanasia versus the Slaughter of Recreational and Sporting Non-Food Animals* to the unsuccessful and unrealistic argument of *Slaughter versus Rescue and Adoption*. I quoted Cathleen Doyle in my article where she said, "This is an indefensible position that played beautifully into the hands of the pro-horse slaughter factions and lobbies."...And she also said the argument from the opposition about the disposition of humanely euthanized equine carcasses is a bogus one. I'm quoting her once again, "*The number of horse carcasses pales in comparison to the number of downed cows, pigs and other farm animals that die every day, not to mention the millions of dogs and cats that are put down annually at shelters. What the opposition and all the big Ag interests are trying to do is make an issue out of a non issue.*"

Speaking of rescue, I just want to say that we at Equine Advocates rescue a lot of horses and will continue to do so, but we never try to confuse horse rescue with arguments for ending horse slaughter....Since I personally have been rescuing horses since 1993 and run Equine Advocates, I feel I have both the experience and an informed opinion to make that point with confidence. We simply just have to ban this horrendous and un-American practice and then everything else will eventually fall into place. The number of surplus horses will drop, the horse industry will be healthier because fewer indiscriminately bred horses would be born and law enforcement would be in a better position to do its job because there will be fewer abuse cases with which to deal.

- **In a post horse slaughter America**, there would not be the level of indiscriminate breeding that now exists by the horse industry and backyard breeders. 140,000 Quarter Horses reportedly are born every year. That's equivalent to the irresponsible mind-set of puppy mill operators and in my opinion, I see no difference between them - breeding for color, conformation and if the horse is not right, just sell him for meat! Those kinds of cruel, indiscriminate & irresponsible breeding practices would decrease dramatically and the number of Quarter Horses born every year would be cut significantly because these people would no longer be getting paid for breeding misery.
- **Without horse slaughter**, irresponsible people would no longer be rewarded for selling their neglected and starving equines at auction. Having horse slaughter encourages a violation of our nation's animal cruelty laws for that very reason.
- **Get rid of horse slaughter** and the level of consumer fraud that now exists at horse slaughter auctions around the country would stop and there would no longer be lies about where these horses are really going because they wouldn't be going there any more! Stolen horses and horses obtained under false pretenses so they could be sold for slaughter would stop!
- **End horse slaughter** and people would be forced to take responsibility for their horses once and for all. Right now there are those who take good care of their horses because they are responsible, but then there are others who don't because they don't have to - But remove the option to sell horses for meat and then see what happens - some people who buy a horse at auction to ride in the spring and then sell the animal for meat in the fall, will have to find that animal a home or put the horse down humanely. Let's face it, the term, "Humane Horse Slaughter" is an oxymoron - there is no such thing...and camps and riding academies and school programs will have to work a little harder to find homes for these animals or put these horses down humanely. It's the right thing to do.

I feel that if this issue is explained properly, and in simple terms, we would receive a lot more broad-based support among our lawmakers, many of whom clearly do not understand it. We already have the vast majority of Americans who support a federal horse slaughter ban, but the Big Ag lobbies will continue to block this legislation unless we get together and present our arguments in such a way that our lawmakers fully understand that we are not trying to save every horse. What we are trying to do is ensure that every horse is provided with a humane, peaceful and dignified end.

In conclusion, I just want to briefly share something else with you to further illustrate my point. I received an email recently from a college student who was studying animal science and planned to become a cattle rancher. We went back and forth because it was very clear that this student had no clue about how slaughter differed from humane euthanasia. I took the time to answer these emails because he said he wanted to become more educated and it became very apparent to me that what this student was being taught was inaccurate and misleading with regard to the horse slaughter issue. The student, who clearly has a Big Ag mentality, somehow forgot about the cultural significance of horses in our society and how different our history would have been if not for The Horse. I explained that the word, "euthanasia" translated is Greek for "good death," as opposed to a terrifying death in a slaughterhouse for a favored animal who on some level previously had a relationship with a human being. This is why horse slaughter is such a betrayal to an animal who basically made the settling of this country possible. We continued our exchange and I really believed that this student was trying to understand our position. I told the student, 'Horses are not bred for food. You are looking at this only from the Big Ag perspective, but horses are not and never will be eaten in this country.'

I told him that this is all about callous, negligent and greedy people finally being pressured to take responsibility for their horses...and then of course, law enforcement must follow up and do its job to enforce the cruelty laws because slaughter has absolutely nothing to do with those who would neglect their horses - that's just yet another bogus argument - Some people cruelly neglect their children, their dogs and their cats and those people get charged by police because they have violated the law. **It should be no different for our wild and domestic equines.** Finally, I said that this issue is as much about who we are as a people and what our values are with respect to The Horse which was deemed a favored animal by our forefathers. If Big Ag profiteers want to turn America into a Third World country for the sake of greed, there is a possibility that they could get their wish, but we will have lost our identity and our soul.

Thank you.