

The case against equine slaughter



To most Americans, the idea of eating horseflesh is repugnant. And yet there are cultures that have made different menu choices than we have. We know of peoples who refuse pork, shellfish and beef—and we know that there are places where dogs and horses are routinely eaten. And we surely would object if our homeless dogs were to be shipped overseas to be eaten by people in other countries—why is there not a greater outcry for horses at risk of the same fate?

Slaughter of horses for human consumption was effectively ended in this country in 2007, when the last plant that processed horses was closed. Still, the threat never went entirely away; horses continue to be shipped from the United States into Canada and Mexico for slaughter. Now the danger looms again—at least four states are attempting to alter the laws to allow equine slaughter plants to operate within their borders.

The pro-slaughter argument has expanded to encompass matters of overpopulation, economics and equine welfare. All of those points can be considered and rebutted in the course of

An animal-welfare advocate challenges the argument that slaughter is a necessary evil for America's horse industry.

By Craig DiBenedictis

debate, but let's not lose sight of what is at the heart of the issue: It's time to take a stand and assert that we don't want our horses eaten—by anyone. For others to do so, especially to the point of setting up foreign-owned plants on our soil, is to brazenly snub our values for theirs.

Why we don't eat horses

A culture might develop a taboo against eating a particular type of animal for many reasons. For example, some are worth more for the work that they do in the local economy, or for the wool and milk that they provide, than for their meat; some are simply

less economical to raise in the local landscape.

In the United States, we've always had ample resources to raise beef and pork, while our horses were valued more as working partners. The days when the "family car" was a horse are now long gone, but there is plenty of evidence that, although more people own cats and dogs as pets, Americans as a whole hold horses in high regard. We hold memorial services for champions like John Henry, we build museums and parks dedicated to horses, we showered an injured Barbaro with get-well cards and flowers—these are not the isolated actions of a few individuals but of communities as a whole. And why not?

Cows and pigs filled our bellies, but horses pulled our wagons, carried our women and children, mined our natural resources, plowed our fields, spearheaded our soldiers into battle, and died on our battlefields. Sentimental drive! Not at all. The horse has earned every stride of greatness it has in our nation's psyche. As J. M. Brereton wrote in *The Horse in War*, "The soldier came to regard his horse almost as an extension of his being."

on't
lget

nutrition at
clusively
contain
ed biotin
s added
nutrition.
Triumph®



anced ration
ce horses.

rena®

America betrayed

It is any wonder then that Americans were shocked to learn that our horses were being slaughtered in secret? For most of the 20th century, the industry led people to believe that only old, lame and sick horses were slaughtered for glue or dog food. Many people sold their horses in good faith at auctions or to killer buyers posing as conduits to a "good home." Others had their horses stolen, never knowing where they really ended up.

Hidden was the fact that thousands of young, healthy horses were being transported under cruel conditions and butchered for foreign gourmands. The slaughter industry knew that Americans would no more stand for this than they would Asians slaughtering our dogs and cats for their meat and fur.

Only when the Internet made it easy to widely promulgate pictures and videos would their secret begin to see the light. What the images show is a far cry from the "easy death" we strive to give our unwanted dogs and cats.

Despite claims by slaughter advocates that our methods of transport and

slaughter are more humane than those across the borders, 900 pages of documents and photos an animal welfare agency recently acquired from the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Freedom of Information Act tell a different story. They show live horses at one U.S. plant with open fractures, legs missing, skin ripped from the body, battered and bloody faces, and the births of foals at the plant. Other photos show horses that succumbed to the miseries of transport and were dead on arrival.

Slaughter is not only a betrayal of the horse, but also of the American public—always with the help of a few people in key government positions squashing the will of the people and their elected representatives.

And the unwanted horses?

An argument we hear frequently from the pro-slaughter forces is that ending the killing will leave us with a huge surplus of unwanted horses—as many as 100,000 per year. Slaughter, they say, is a necessary evil.

One question that is never asked,

Unlike the euthanasia of dogs and cats at shelters, equine slaughter is not about the welfare of the horse—it's a kill-for-profit industry that depends upon excess horses for survival.

however, is "To what extent does slaughter contribute to its own 'necessity'?"

Unlike the euthanasia of dogs and cats at shelters, equine slaughter is not about the welfare of the horse—it's a kill-for-profit industry that depends upon excess horses for its survival. Corporate and political alliances have formed to make sure the profits are not interrupted. A case in point: Politicians opposed to closing the plants in Texas and Illinois argued that jobs would be lost.

Moreover, the message that has permeated parts of the equestrian world is that horses are commodities easily disposed of. This view has long given too many people the freedom and incentive

HORSE SLAUGHTER LEGISLATION STATUS REPORT

Montana: Legislation (House Bill 418) to allow the development of a horse processing plant in the state became law in May.

North Dakota: A measure (House Bill 1496) enabling the state to conduct a feasibility study regarding a horse-processing facility went into effect in July.

Tennessee: A proposal (House Bill 1428) to allow the development of a horse slaughter plant in the state stalled in the Senate Commerce Committee and will remain there until 2010. In addition, a measure (House Bill 1361) that would change the packaging and labeling requirements for horse meat remains in committee.

Illinois: A measure (House Bill 583) to legalize slaughtering horses for human consumption in the state failed.

U.S. Congress: Several pieces of equine-related legislation are pending in the current legislative session, which lasts until the end of October. These include:

- An amendment to the Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (House Resolution 1018) that prohibits the euthanasia of healthy horses under the care of the Bureau of Land Management and expands acreage available to free-roaming herds is awaiting a full House vote.

- The Prevention of Equine Cruelty Act (House Resolution 503), which would "prohibit the shipping, transporting,

moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling, or donation of horses and other equines to be slaughtered for human consumption, and for other purposes," was referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security in March.

- The Horse Transportation Safety Act of 2009 (House Resolution 305), which would ban interstate transport of horses using double-deck vehicles, was referred to the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit in January.

For more information see, "States Consider Pro-horse Slaughter Measures, Resolutions," Roundup (EQUUS 380), also available on EquusMagazine.com.

to be irresponsible. Or, at the very least, it allows well-meaning people to deny or ignore what happens to horses that no longer suit their needs and are sold. Many people who would never consider sending horses to slaughter outright will nonetheless consign difficult, old or injured horses to low-end auctions where killer buyers are likely to buy them. How many funds, networks and creative ideas for unwanted horses were never developed because slaughter took away the need for another solution and made us complacent?

Eliminating the export of horses for slaughter and keeping slaughter plants closed in this country will force us to face these realities and go beyond token attempts at dealing with the problem of unwanted horses. Consider what has happened in just the past two years after increased publicity of slaughterhouse conditions led to the closure of the last three U.S. plants that took horses: Industry leaders organized colloquiums such as the Unwanted Horse

Many people who would never consider sending horses to slaughter outright will nonetheless consign difficult, old or injured horses to low-end auctions where killer buyers are likely to buy them.



Council and Homes for Horses Conference. Some racetracks are now denying stalls to trainers who send their horses to slaughter. New funds for retired racehorses have been created and supplied by donations acquired from sales of horses at auctions, winning purses and entry fees.

A rescue in Northern California began providing a free euthanasia service. Some are calling for horse registries to look closely at policies that may unwittingly encourage overbreeding.

There is much more that can be done. But if slaughterhouses reopen for horses in the United States, will it happen? "Necessity is the mother of invention" is an old adage, but without the necessity, what then?

The question of cruelty

Opponents of a ban on horse slaughter warn that otherwise compassionate owners will have no choice but to abandon and starve their unwanted horses. But this assumes that the availability

New Book and DVD from Dr. Gerd Heuschmann

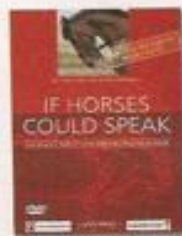


Tug of War: Classical versus "Modern" Dressage

Why Classical Training Works and How Incorrect "Modern" Riding Negatively Affects Horses' Health

German rider and equine veterinarian Dr. Gerd Heuschmann is well-known in dressage circles. Here, he presents an intelligent and thought-provoking exploration of both classical and "modern" training methods, including "hyperflexion" (also

known as Rollkur), against a practical backdrop of the horse's basic anatomy and physiology. 144 pp., #ZF570, \$24.95



If Horses Could Speak

Through the magic of amazing three-dimensional animation, this DVD shows viewers how the horse's limbs, muscles, and ligaments interact at various gaits. In addition, live-action examples of riding, both good and bad, demonstrate the effect human beings have on their equine "partners." Viewers are sure to be astounded by the direct role their riding has on their horse's physical and mental health and well-being. Run time: 75 min., #ZDV398, \$59.95

Save 10% on online orders at www.HorseBooksEtc.com or call 1-800-952-5813

Please call for shipping and handling charges and states with applicable sales tax.



HorseBooksEtc.com

of slaughter affects whether people are compassionate or cruel. Since 2007 there has been a reported upsurge in horses neglected and abandoned—but this trend parallels the increase in dogs and cats suffering the same fate. It's due to the downturn in the economy; the ban on slaughter can't be blamed. Great Britain still has equine slaughter, but the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reported a 33 percent increase of horse abuse cases in 2007, including a woman who let her pregnant mare starve to death in sight of a thousand bales of hay.

Well before equine slaughter was ended in the United States, irresponsible and/or disturbed people were starving and neglecting horses. Cruel people will be cruel regardless, and compassionate horse owners will find no excuse sufficient. The former need to be prosecuted; the latter should be helped. Here is where horse communities can practice real community—by creating funds to help people who've fallen on

hard times so that they can continue to care for their horses. The funds could either help until they regain their incomes or until they've had the time to seek out another humane solution, such as donating their animals to a rescue or selling them to good homes. In extreme cases, these funds could also be used to humanely euthanize horses when the owners cannot afford it.

I have seen heartbreaking cases in my work with horse and dog rescues. Never for a second have I believed that slaughter would reduce cruelty to unwanted horses. On the contrary, slaughter inflicts cruelties of its own.

The manner of death we assign animals says just as much about their standing with us as the way we treat them in life. By exempting our horses, like our dogs and cats, from becoming food animals, we are saying that if and when they have to be put down, it will happen in a way that recognizes the special place they have in our hearts and culture. ●

About the author

Craig DiBenedictis was pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church in Allenwood, New Jersey, for 24 years. In addition to serving as state coordinator for the New Jersey Chapter of the American Horse Defense Fund, DiBenedictis has volunteered at Refun, New Jersey, and has been cosponsor of a retired racehorse (Infinite Crescendo) for eight years. He has also volunteered with Golden Retriever Rescue, New Jersey, transporting dogs, conducting phone interviews and making home inspections for adoptions. DiBenedictis recently completed educational requirements for certification as an Animal Control Officer in the State of New Jersey.

What do you think?

Share your views about equine slaughter on the EQUUS forum.

www.EquusMagazine.com



DISCOVER THE ULTIMATE IN HOOF PROTECTION

New Boots for 2009!

Easyboot *Glove*
Easyboot *Glue-On*
Easyboot *Edge*
Easyboot *Rx*

Log on to learn about all of our NEW riding and therapy boots!



EasyCare
easycareinc.com

2300 East Vistoso Commerce Loop Rd.
Tucson, AZ 85715 | 800.447.8838



seam•less

—adjective

1. Smoothly continuous or uniform in quality:
a seamless blend of craftsmanship and distinction.

LUCAS EQUINE EQUIPMENT, Inc.

seamless. flawless. timeless.



Cynthiana, Kentucky 888.577.6920 www.lucasequine.com