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May 17, 2010

To: American Veterinary Medical Association

cc: file

We are writing to you today on behalf of the Equine Welfare Alliance and its members regarding your article in the JAVMA entitled, *Mexico, Canada increase horse slaughter production* [<http://www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/may10/100515o.asp>].

While we realize the article is drafted to support AVMA's pro-slaughter position, the blatantly erroneous information and omission of pertinent information by a veterinary association is disconcerting.

Your article begins with: The number of U.S. horses slaughtered in North America has dropped nearly 40 percent since its peak in 2007, which is incorrect. The peak year for horses slaughtered was 1990 at 419,133, broken down as follows:

US 345,200  
Mexico 3,435  
Canada 70,498

The data from the years 2000-2009 shows the peak year was 2006 while 2008, the year following the closure of the U.S. plants, was the next highest. The average number of US horses slaughtered annually increased 13% after the plants closed. Whether you look at horses slaughtered from 1990- 2009 or 2000-2009, there was not a decrease of 40%, and, in fact, the latter data reflects an increase. The closing of the U.S. plants did not cause a drop in the number of horses slaughtered.

Also, by the end of 2009, during the worldwide economic collapse, horse meat exports from Canada were down 20% and from Mexico, down 19%. Surely, it is obvious that the reason the number of horses slaughtered decreased in 2009 was due to the decline in the demand for

horse meat. The facilities slaughter only the number of horses required to fill the demand for horse meat and not the number of available horses. Most significant is that although the statistic for the numbers of US horses slaughtered decreased in 2009, unchanged is the fact that the option for US owners to send horses to slaughter has always remained and currently still is just as available as it was during the time the US slaughter facilities were operating, even when none of them were operating at full capacity levels.

The article continues with this statement in reference to 2007: "the last year horses were processed in the United States after a federal district court ordered the Department of Agriculture to stop inspecting horse slaughter facilities."

The horses are actually slaughtered. Why not say the word instead of using the euphemism "processed"? Also, it was Congress in 2006 that de-funded or stopped the ante-mortem inspections of horses in the Agriculture Appropriations Act of 2006 that was signed by Pres. George W. Bush. This meant horses could no longer be slaughtered for human consumption in the U.S. A federal court in 2007 simply found the USDA was in violation of the law in permitting these inspections under a "fee for service" rule. Horse slaughter for human consumption was shut down in the U.S. in 2007 by Congress and the President as well as the federal court. The plant in Illinois was allowed to operate under a stay while it appealed to the Supreme Court. In May of 2007, the state of Illinois passed a law making horse slaughter illegal and the federal courts upheld the law and the plant closed in September, 2007.

Another federal court upheld a Texas law banning horse slaughter, closing the 2 facilities that operated in that state in 2007.

Despite the strong statement by the President, Congress, federal courts and individual states to shut down the horse slaughter industry, plants shifted their business over the borders.

The article further points out nine states that have introduced and considered legislation, but what about the numerous states that have rejected this legislation or actually prohibit horse slaughter?

There is no mention of Tennessee bill HB 1428 that has been tabled pending "summer study" or that Montana's plan to build a plant in Hardin is now withdrawn resulting from an ordinance that was amended that prohibits the slaughter of more than 10 animals in a 7 day period.

HB 4812 in Illinois was withdrawn. IL Representative, John Fritchey has also introduced nonbinding legislation to support the federal legislation to ban horse slaughter.

AVMA has claimed that the most common and preferred method of choice to end a horse's life is by humane euthanasia administered by a veterinarian. AVMA continues, however, to state that the captive bolt gun previously used in the US horse slaughter facilities is listed as acceptable

and humane even though the AVMA is aware that their own requirement of the horse's head being restrained is not possible and not implemented at slaughter plants. The study that deemed the captive bolt gun acceptable was performed in a controlled environment by veterinarians for veterinarians. It is a gross misuse of that study to claim the findings would even be remotely the same in a horse slaughter facility environment where the horses are terrified and extremely stressed, workers are unskilled, and the horses' heads are not restrained and where hundreds of horses are slaughtered per day.

The outrageous cruelty of horse slaughter that was recently exposed by documented information and video from undercover investigations caused outrage in Europe. European consumers realized they had been misled by a disinformation campaign waged by slaughter proponents that told them the horses they had been consuming did not suffer or die inhumanely and that the meat was free of medications and nutritious. Investigations in Canada, Mexico and South America have damaged this consumer confidence. The second largest grocer in Belgium has removed US horse meat from its shelves. A major distributor has assured its customers that they will only sell European horse meat. Two major slaughter plants in Canada are under investigation by government agencies.

The same food safety and humane issues have been documented in investigations of the US plants over the past decade, and also, hundreds of pictures of horrible cruelty violations against horses in transport to slaughter were revealed through a USDA FOIA. It's beyond comprehension that the AVMA could view any of the information from investigations and FOIAs and still claim horse slaughter and anything associated with it, is acceptable and humane. AVMA's voice to support horse slaughter has helped keep the slaughter pipeline open ensuring the brutal and cruel death of thousands of horses will continue.

Is the AVMA aware of new EU regulations that will prohibit the vast majority of US horses from going to slaughter? Your members write the prescriptions for horse medication so are certainly aware that almost all are labeled "not intended for food animals". Surely, they are aware that US horses are not safe for human consumption.

US horses are not bred or raised as food animals. With the absence of a passport system or health certificates, there is no way to determine if a horse has received a substance that is prohibited by the FDA and EU in food animals and there are no mechanisms to remove horses that have received banned substances from the slaughter pipeline. Thus, horsemeat derived from American horses sent to slaughter for human consumption is likely contaminated.

In view of the cruelty to horses and danger to the public, how does AVMA continue to support this seedy, long outmoded practice, a stance that must be in violation of the Veterinarian's Oath to promote public health to "protection ...animal health, ... relieve... animal suffering, [and] the promotion of public health"?

If you have not already reviewed this scientific paper, *Association of phenylbutazone usage with horses bought for slaughter: A public health risk*, written by Drs. Nicholas Dodman, Nicolas Blondeau and Ann M. Marini that was published in the peer reviewed journal, *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, a copy follows this letter.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We hope to see a corrected future article as well as articles that address these issues.

Also, Vicki Tobin is an Illinois resident in your area and would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss this further.

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### **Statements from Veterinarians**

"Why would the AAEP and AVMA support such an industry? Have they considered the inevitable suffering that the current situation brings about as opposed to the hypothetical suffering that these horses endure if they live?"

- Nicholas H. Dodman, DVM, Diplomate ACVA and ACVB

"From the time a horse is picked up by the killer buyer he is meat on the hoof, and that is the way he is treated. In a journey which can take days, or occasionally weeks, he is jammed into trucks, often where he cannot even stand, and left to fend for himself among a load of other terrified horses. Some of these horses actually have fractures and are in great pain. USDA regulations state that they can go 28 hours without food and water (bad enough) and even this is unenforceable. When the horse reaches the slaughterhouse, death is by captive bolt, and if anyone thinks this always works the first time, we have a film they should see. As a veterinarian I realize the inevitability of euthanasia in certain cases, but to equate the slaughter process with humane euthanasia is the height of hypocrisy."

- John K. Griggs, DVM

"As a veterinarian, I believe that it is my responsibility to treat all of my patients in a humane manner. Looking at the condition of slaughter-bound horses in the videos and photographs taken by journalists, investigators and welfare personnel (over many years), I could never explain to a client or to a child what is humane about their transport, and I would certainly never recommend this avenue of disposing of a horse to a client. If I cannot support these practices to my clients as being humane, how can I stand up as a professional and present them to the public as such?"

- Nena J. Winand, DVM, PhD

"I would like to impress upon you that the AVMA and AAEP may represent me by profession, but they do not represent me on this issue and until they can show you polling of their membership reflecting it, please do not believe that their governing bodies represent the views of the people they claim to either. Accordingly, I urge you to support HR 503 in any and every way you can!!!! Thank You!!!!"

- Kerry Zeigler, VMD

Affidavit to Members of Congress:

February 29, 2008

Lester Friedlander, DVM

"Distinguished Members of Congress, my name is Dr. Lester Friedlander and I am a former USDA Veterinarian. I am refuting the testimony of Dr. Bonnie Beaver, DVM, that the captive bolt is a humane procedure of euthanasia for horses. The captive bolt does not meet the humane method of slaughter, as described in the 1958 "Humane Slaughter Act." Head restraints are not used in the slaughter of horses and therefore do not comply with the Statue. The captive bolt is used in cattle, due to the fact the cow's brain is more anterior than the horse's brain and the penetration of the bolt is more effective. Horses are not, and cannot be restrained, during horse slaughter. I have seen several video tapes of horse slaughter where the horses have to be struck with the captive bolt several times. No head restraints were used; to do so would cause these flight animals to break their necks. During these multiple times of striking the horses head with the captive bolt, the horses are in pain and suffering. It is important to know that the captive bolt does not kill the horse, nor was it ever intended to. The horse must be exsanguinated to be suitable for human consumption. As the captive bolt is not a proper instrument for the slaughter of equids, and these animals regain consciousness thirty seconds after being struck, they are fully aware they are vivisected. Ergo, the use of the captive bolt for equids is a violation of the Humane Slaughter Act of 1958. I ask you to support HR 503 and S 311 in the best interest of horses"

~Lester Friedlander, DVM

The Veterinarians for Equine Welfare White Paper on the Captive Bolt can be found at [http://www.vetsforequinewelfare.org/white\\_paper.php](http://www.vetsforequinewelfare.org/white_paper.php)