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EWA Exec Sends Scathing Letter to Lenz Challenging his Facts

CHICAGO, (EWA) - In response to your recent article of Feb 10, 2010, "The Unwanted Horse in the United States - international implications" in which you stated "Unfortunately, the debate over the processing of horses for human consumption has polarized the US horse industry and non-horse owning public" and "the American horse industry and the Federal government classify horses as "livestock" whereas the non-horse owning public considers the horse a "companion animal" or pet", it's important to point out that thousands of horse owners along with many horse associations within the horse industry are also opposed to horse slaughter and you can not dismiss those of us who are horse owners from being part of the horse industry merely because we oppose horse slaughter and/or view our horses as companion animals.

In your article you stated, "According to the American Horse Council study, rescues reported the cost to maintain a horse for one year to be \$2300 on average. If the horses sent to processing plants in 2008 had been rescued, it would have cost the industry \$343 million. This annual cost, however, understates the total cost required because unwanted horses that would have been processed in previous years will now remain in the horse population.", although it was explained all throughout the report you listed as your source, "Unwanted Horse Forum - Now What", June 2008, that it would currently be impossible to estimate accurate population numbers or price costs for excess horses due to the fact that no real data exists on the numbers of excess horses since no regulated government agency has ever been assigned to collect that information.

All members who attended the forum admitted that there is no true definition of what an "unwanted horse" actually is and each member from the different organizations had differing definitions of the "unwanted horse" and therefore it is not known which information is needed to be collected to determine the numbers of excess horses or the cost for their care. The only conclusion finally reached was that there was a general disagreement on the definition of an "unwanted horse".

Further explained in the report was that because no data exists on this subject, there are no statistics to be able to compare whether or not there has been an increase or decrease of excess horses so no one can accurately claim that numbers of excess horses are on the rise.

Because the problem of excess horses was unknown until the problem arose with mad cow disease and the legislation to ban horse slaughter in 2001 brought awareness to the general public, the issue was not given media attention prior to 2001, and it is impossible to know how large the excess horse problem was before that time. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate an increase or decrease of excess horses since 2001, or be able to state whether the problem has gotten better or worse.

These differing price costs presented from the various organizations attending the forum further proves that estimating a reliable and accurate annual cost is impossible without access to available accurate data to use:

Animal Welfare Council: \$220 million each year based on 2005 statistics

Congressman Goodlatte: \$530 million a year by 2016

Unwanted Horse Coalition: \$234 million a year (previous estimated price)

Unwanted Horse Coalition: \$ 343 million a year (estimated price as of Feb 10, 2009)

Unwanted Horse Coalition: \$393 million a year (current estimated price)

Even those figures are now out of date due to the unexpected decrease in the numbers of the 2009 horses exported for slaughter.

Your statement aimed at blaming the public for the 3 strikes horses (over the age of 10 and offered for adoption unsuccessfully 3 times) that have been placed in long term facilities; "pressure from animal activists and public sentiment has not allowed these animals to be euthanized or sold for slaughter", was just nonsense due to the twisted spin, although it was a surprise that you as a veterinarian, would so openly display such a lack of compassion and regard for life without guilt or shame. However, feeling guilt and shame depends on how you judge yourself on whether or not you're upholding your own standard of moral values assuming that it matters to you. I thought veterinarians were sworn by oath to provide medical services that promote good health and to strive to save and extend lives, rather than to destroy them. The "sentimental" public would rather see the wild horses left on the range where they belong than to be placed in holding facilities, but until legislation to protect their freedom on the range has passed, at least alive they have a chance to be adopted into a good home, and live a good life. But they wouldn't have that chance dead, and it would be an injustice to destroy them.

Despite whatever you may feel about them, as wild horses who have never been owned, they have not contributed to the domestic excess numbers and should not be added into the excess horse population. These horses did have homes and were not in need of homes until they were unjustly taken from their range. In truth, they should be classified as stolen.

Nat Messer of the UHC and AVMA, tried to justify including the wild horse population as "unwanted horses" by claiming those offered for adoption in the short term facilities and in need homes are "unwanted" if no one adopts them. Even though that's absurd and unreasonable, it would be even more absurd to add their numbers to the total care cost of excess horses because their cost and care has already been paid for and funded with tax payer dollars allocated to the Bureau of Land Management. Even the long term holding horses were included, despite thousands that are not for adoption or sale which are also already funded through BLM. Because the long term facility ranchers receive millions of tax payer dollars annually to care for those horses, those horses are wanted by the

facility ranchers for income. By including their numbers to the cost price we can only assume the excess horse numbers are intentionally being driven up to show highly inflated cost totals.

Another issue to address, is that when the US plants were shutting down there was an outcry from slaughter supporters that horses would be forced to travel longer distances where they would suffer a horrible and far worse death over the borders in foreign plants which were not regulated by USDA. But thousands of US horses were exported to both Canada and Mexico all during the years the US facilities were operating, and slaughter supporters never complained about their suffering and the inhumane slaughter practice until the US facilities closed. The methods of slaughter in Canada and Mexico were the same methods used then when the US was slaughtering our horses, and are the same methods they're currently using now.

If the suffering of horses over the borders when the US plants closed was their true concern, it seems they would have supported the horse slaughter ban to prohibit the export of horses to slaughter. Without federal legislation to prohibit the export to slaughter, bringing slaughter plants back to the US will not stop the export of horses to slaughter and they would continue to be exported as they previously had when the US facilities were still in operation. They might have attempted to introduce legislation that would allow for the return of US facilities and at the same time prohibit the export to slaughter of horses, but since they didn't, it appears that the suffering of exported horses is not their true concern.

The report noted an increase in the number of horses now being euthanized which was counted as an increase in excess horse numbers. Because these horses died at home and never entered the excess horse population, it makes no sense to add them to the excess numbers. Haven't horse owners always accepted the responsibility of paying their own costs when euthanizing a horse? Why should the price for euthanasia be added to the price cost for excess horses? Perhaps because more horse owners are now aware that if their horse is sold at auction it could end up slaughtered, that they're choosing instead to have their horses humanely euthanized at home.

Rescues are typically funded through private funding and donations often by those you refer to as "the non-horseowning public" and the sentimental "activists", so why are all the currently rescued horse numbers, including those rescued in the past along with an estimated number for those rescued in the future being added to the cost price? Have the horse breeding associations decided it's time they help out with the funding for the care of the excess numbers of horses they've been breeding? If there are plans to collect funds for rescued horses, will showing a highly inflated price tag that must be "absorbed" by the horse industry generate more generous funding?

One group of statistics that has been completely ignored is the number of horses that were imported from Canada for slaughter in the US. Because those horses were from Canada and were not US horses although they were added to the statistics as horses slaughtered in the US, they were not US excess horses and their numbers should not be included for calculating the US excess horse population for previous years.

Canadian imports:

2005 - 7,865 horses imported from Canada for slaughter in the U.S.

2006 - 4,022 horses imported from Canada for slaughter in the U.S.

2007 - 2,488 horses imported from Canada for slaughter in the U.S.

Those particular horses are also very important for another reason in that they raise the question that if we had so many excess horses already in the US, why did the US slaughter plants need to import more? Their statistics are evidence which prove that there were not enough excess horses in the US to supply the US slaughter facilities. In 2001 when the demand for horse meat in Europe had skyrocketed due to mad cow and foot and mouth disease, the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association reported that horse theft had risen by over 50%. It's well known that many stolen horses were sent to slaughter, and that horse slaughter is the leading cause of horse theft. During that same time articles had quoted the horse slaughter industry owners & operators that they just couldn't slaughter the horses fast enough, supplies were limited and they were having a hard time meeting the demand for horse meat abroad. It's the demand for horse meat that drives up the numbers of excess horses needed to supply that demand.

You stated that in 1989 approximately 339,000 horses were slaughtered annually, and by 2007, less than 150,000 were slaughtered or exported to slaughter. And you said the question to be answered is "Why was there an 80% reduction?" But another question to be asked which can be answered by these statistics, is that with such a huge decrease in the numbers of horses slaughtered annually which should have been rising each year as well, why weren't we overrun with horses by the thousands, running down the highways, trampling through city parks, or grazing on the lawns of our federal buildings, and how come our jails weren't filled with abusers and neglectful owners and why wasn't the media reporting stories of thousands of horses being abandoned? Those horses had to have been here somewhere. How come no one noticed them? There weren't nearly as many rescues operating then as there are today, so how did they disappear and where did they go? Couldn't it be possible that the excess numbers were absorbed into the horse population without anyone noticing them and that the huge problem of excess horses without a slaughter industry, isn't as huge as you thought it was?

Although it's become very clear that your intent is to drive up the numbers and the cost as high as possible for excess horses, nowhere in your article or in the report, did you mention 'who' in the horse industry would be responsible for the cost? Who are you hoping to scare? Farriers? Hay producers or grain companies? Wouldn't they actually increase the income and economy of the horse industry?

Because the UHC is an umbrella organization created by organizations whose members actively support and promote horse slaughter, despite the claim that UHC's only purpose is to find solutions to help solve the problem of excess horses and will not become involved in legislation or take a stance on the horse slaughter issue, I believe the true intention of the UHC is to deceive the members of congress and try to sway their opinion against banning horse slaughter, and as well, striving to ensure horse industry members are convinced that the horse industry cannot possibly survive without the horse slaughter industry.

I can't help but wonder how that benefits you.

Valerie James-Patton
Equine Welfare Alliance
EWA Research Subject Matter Expert (SME)
<http://www.equinewelfarealliance.org/>