



Preserving the Slaughter Option - Fact Over Furor

A surprising number of horse enthusiasts remain unaware of the controversy currently brewing between animal rights groups and much of the horse industry over federal and state legislation aimed at eliminating horse slaughter in Illinois and/or the United States. Although the wording of the legislation technically calls for the elimination of the production of horsemeat for human consumption, its ultimate effect will be to remove humane slaughter of horses from the list of available options for removing unwanted horses from the US population and thereby put our horses and our industry at risk. The animal rights groups are making a very vocal national campaign of this, and in the process are promulgating a good amount of misinformation and emotionality, designed to get pet-loving non-horsemen to support their agenda.

Various arguments and sleight-of-hand are being used to support the animal rights activists' agenda, but when their stance is distilled down to its essence, it comes down to these two points: they believe that *they* are best qualified to determine the care and disposition of our horses, and they claim the right to dictate that American horses shall not be allowed entry into the human food chain.

What does this mean? It means that animal rights groups, mostly composed of members who have never owned a horse and have most certainly never visited a slaughter facility, will dictate to horsemen what *they* consider to be the appropriate standards for humane treatment of horses. The animal rights activists' opinion in this case will supercede that of groups such as

the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Horse Council, American Quarter Horse Association, Illinois Farm Bureau and individual state horse councils, and the many horse associations dedicated to the welfare and promotion of their horses and horse activities.

What are the issues?

The long and short of this controversy is that some people view the consumption of horsemeat to be revolting, and since they find it revolting, they say it should be banned. These people equate the horse slaughter industry with the preparation of Black Beauty for the dinner table, and they use the welfare of the horse as the excuse for their movement. Their position papers are liberally peppered with words such as “evil,” “unscrupulous,” “revulsion,” “inhumane tragedy,” “cruel” and “greedy.”

What, exactly, are the horse welfare issues surrounding humane slaughter of horses? Both the horsemen and the opponents of slaughter agree – assurance of humane care for horses in life, humane transport of horses and assurance of a humane death. The difference between horsemen’s views and those of the Animal Rights activists is in the representation of the facts surrounding these issues.

Preserve slaughter for the welfare of the horse

Although it sounds odd, horsemen wanting to preserving slaughter are after the same end as horse lovers seeking to ban the practice, that being the ultimate welfare of the horse and the preservation of a US horse industry that supports our enjoyment of this marvelous animal. This is not the same end that the animal rights groups seek. They have a much broader agenda in which banning horse slaughter is merely the tip of the iceberg. These radical groups feel that any human use of an animal is a form of enslavement and should be abolished. Look for them to proceed to attack rodeo, horse racing, carriage driving and eventually all forms of horse showing after they dispose of the horse slaughter issue. Go to the PETA website for a listing of their activist issues – you will find “Rodeo: Cruelty for a Buck,” “Horse Racing: A Losing Bet,” “Carriage Horses: Don’t Get Taken for a Ride.”

Those working to ban the humane slaughter of horses use the humane issue as their soapbox. But their arguments largely address the perceived humane issues surrounding the *death* of horses, not their life. Because they are well acquainted with the inner workings of the horse industry, horsemen are acutely aware of what many of these hobbyists, pet owners and animal rights activists are not, that humane care for *living* horses is likely to decline if humane

slaughter is outlawed. That is likely to happen due to the overpopulation of unwanted horses with no place to go. In the very same white paper that they commissioned to promote the anti-slaughter legislation, the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation admitted that, “while very few people would dispute the idea that the world is a better place because horses are in it, no one has thought about the consequences of having many more horses than it can reasonably sustain.”

Horses consigned to slaughter are unwanted, unusable, unsound or unsafe. They are not good candidates for sale, otherwise they would be sold to private ownership and never consigned to slaughter. For these horses, the only alternatives are adoption by one of the growing number of horse rescue organizations, euthanasia by the owner or sale for humane slaughter.

Giving up an unusable horse to rescue agencies may involve no cost to the owners, or it may obligate them to provide some “donation” for the continued care of the animal. Most existing horse rescue agencies do a good job and provide for the humane care of their equine charges, although their actual adoption rates for the horses in their care are typically lower than public assumptions. Likely the number of these horse rescue agencies will increase if the currently proposed federal ban on horse slaughter is passed, if for no other reason than the legislation provides for monies collected from fines and for federally created grants to go to such agencies. Unfortunately, although financial assistance for horse rescue facilities has been provided for in the federal anti-slaughter legislation, guidelines for the licensure of such facilities or for standards of care and treatment of the adopted horses has not. Imagine the irony of horse rescue agencies feeding off the milk of kindness provided by the anti-slaughter activists, only to turn a profit while mistreating the horses they were charged with saving. If only a fraction of the 85,000 US horses currently consigned to slaughter (about 55,000 in US slaughter plants and about 30,000 sent to Canada) make it to the horse rescue doorsteps, it will overwhelm the system. There are simply not enough of these groups available to meet the demand.

Who will choose adoption or donation? Hapless owners who find themselves in the situation where they cannot sell their horse because of the disappearance of the low-end market, formerly supported by the slaughter industry. Many of these owners may be too squeamish to face the need for euthanasia. Without an avenue for sale, most of these owners would consider giving away the horse, but once the horse adoption and rescue agencies are full, where will these owners and their horses go? Some horses are not viable candidates for these rescue or

adoption agencies; where will they go? If they are unfit for human use, perhaps it is because they are dangerous. Yet, if they are young and healthy, they could well end up sold into the hands of an unsuspecting and unprepared new owner, putting them at grave risk.

If not euthanasia, then what?

Euthanasia may be the kindest end for a number of these unwanted horses, but inevitably there will be a number of owners who will be unwilling to face the reality of euthanizing their horse, or will be unwilling to shoulder the costs and responsibilities associated with euthanasia. Those costs are not insignificant. The veterinary fees usually will range from \$50-\$150, but this is just the beginning. If local regulations allow, the horse's body can be buried according to Department of Agriculture guidelines. This will entail charges for backhoe services of \$100-\$300. Some states and municipalities do not allow burial. One of the national trends in the horse industry is that horsekeeping is becoming more urbanized; since burial of something as large as a horse is not allowed in most densely populated urban areas, burial is not the answer for a growing number of horse owners. Also, barbiturate residues from the euthanizing agent pose a hazard to animals, ground water and the environment. According to the AVMA report of the Panel on Euthanasia, "these drugs tend to persist in the carcass and may cause sedation or even death of animals that consume the body".

The other legal option for disposal is to have the body hauled off by a renderer (\$50-\$200), or if the rendering plant does not provide for carcass pickup, transportation must be arranged. This is provided that there *is* a rendering facility within a reasonable distance. According to the National Renderers Association, there are approximately 285 rendering plants in the entire US. Once again, if only a fraction of the 85,000 US horses currently being slaughtered are added to the euthanasia-and-rendering rolls, there simply would not be enough rendering plants to accommodate them.

With options limited, will horses be left to starve?

If you can't sell to slaughter, if your horse is not accepted for adoption, if you can't bury on your property and you can't dispose of the horse's body at the renderers, *what do you do?*

What many horsemen with an intimate understanding of the good and the bad in the horse industry fear is that a substantial number of unwanted horses with no other avenues for their removal will be left to starve. Veterinarians in Florida tell stories about unwanted horses being turned out into the swamps "for the gators." Horses could be left to freeze in the harsh Montana and North Dakota winters, or to starve when left to their own devices in the scrublands

of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Rural areas can hide these cases of abandonment and neglect easier than the suburban and urban areas can. Those cases that occur near populated areas will likely be reported, but if the horse rescue agencies already are full of unwanted horses donated from responsible owners, who will take in the abandoned and neglected ones?

Those in favor of banning horse slaughter argue that the number of horses consigned to slaughter in the US has declined over the past decade, presumably putting more horses into the general population, and yet the horse welfare agencies have not reported a substantial increase in humane calls. One factor explaining this phenomenon may be that there are more horse rescue and adoption agencies now than there were a decade ago. Thus unwanted horses hitting the system during the past decade could be spread out and absorbed into a humane system that has not yet reached critical mass. Problems still can be in the offing; most of these rescue agencies admit that they are at capacity. Complicating this issue is the fact that no national statistics are kept on humane incidences, so this factor cannot be tracked accurately. Also there are no reliable statistics kept on horse numbers in the US, on the number of horses euthanized in the US or on the numbers of horse carcasses rendered in the US. How can one support or refute an argument without facts? If horse slaughter is declining, exports are not increasing (statistics are available), horse rendering is not increasing (according to an estimate from National Renderer's Association), and the overall horse population is aging but not significantly increasing (American Horse Council), where are all these unwanted horses going now? More importantly, if we add tens of thousands more per year to these numbers, where will they all go then?

Slaughter is a choice; it is not mandatory

The opponents of horse slaughter claim that the practice of slaughter is cruel. Cruelty is defined as an act that deliberately causes pain, distress or anguish. Euthanasia is defined as a humane death that occurs without pain and distress. According to Dr. Temple Grandin¹, the world's leading researcher in this area, "When slaughter is performed properly, it is euthanasia." Horse slaughter in the US is euthanasia and therefore by its very definition not cruel.

Slaughter is not a decision for everyone, and ***no one is forced into slaughtering their horse in this country***. Slaughter should, however, remain as a viable and humane option to end the life of an unwanted horse. True horsemen deal with numbers of horses on a daily basis, and

¹ Grandin, T. Euthanasia and slaughter of livestock. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association. Vol 204:1354-1360. 1994.

most earn their living from these creatures. The difference between the perspective of the true horsemen and the horse hobbyists – or even the non-horse owning pet lovers – is that horsemen understand the hard realities of practical horsekeeping. Horsemen who support slaughter (and the majority of them do) are not inhumane, uncaring people. In fact, most demonstrate their deep commitment to their horses every day of their lives by putting their animals' needs and sensibilities ahead of their own. These people interact with their horses every day of the year. They are out with their horses at all hours and in all weather, feeding them, doctoring them, training them and caring for them. Who has more right to determine the ultimate fate of the animals they own and care for than the horsemen?

The horse hobbyist has a superficial understanding of the horse industry, and the pet owner who weighs in on the slaughter issue has none. In the words of a 35-year horse industry veteran who has raised, trained and shown horses, and who also owns a trail-riding string, the idea of banning horse slaughter “is kind of romantic, but it’s a way city people think.” It is easy for the hobbyist to be convinced of the benefits of chemical euthanasia over humane slaughter. Many have never held the end of a lead rope for a horse being put down, or held firm while the horse staggers or even bolts as the chemical takes effect, and then waited the agonizing minutes for the horse’s heart to finally stop beating ... and for the job to be over. How many hobbyists can say that they have dealt with the long hours or even days of passing by the horse’s body, in the performance of their duties to those still living, while waiting for the rendering truck to come? Certainly none of these hobbyists and pet owners have ever witnessed the swift and sure death of an animal at a slaughterhouse. It is easy to condemn that which they do not know. Grisly? Yes, slaughter is not for the faint of heart. Inhumane? Absolutely not.

The very people who decry the concept of humane slaughter of horses don’t have a grasp of the reality of the problem caused by excess horses the way horsemen do. Yet they are quick to judge, quick to feel superior, quick to condemn. Why should dedicated horsemen be condemned because, along with promoting the value of the living horse, they seek some value in its death as well? Face it – dead is dead, and it makes no difference to the horse what happens after that. As long as the animal is dispatched quickly and painlessly, what difference does use of the carcass make?

Animal rights groups intentionally misleading

The animal rights groups have no problem with rendering a horse carcass, reducing the muscle, sinew and bone to fertilizer. They do, however, have a problem with dressing and

packaging a horse carcass for meat. The true issue for anti-slaughter activists is not *really* the way that the horse lived its life or even how it was dispatched in its death, but the fact that somewhere along the line a human may consume the flesh of the slaughtered horse. For the animal rights groups to hide their disgust at the idea of humans eating horsemeat behind the pretense of ensuring humane euthanasia is intentional misdirection and hypocrisy.

Humane euthanasia can be achieved by a number of methods. None are foolproof and none are pretty. Both chemical euthanasia through overdosing with barbiturates and euthanasia by shooting the animal with a penetrating captive bolt pistol are accepted as *equally humane methods of euthanasia* by those who should know, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). In fact, the AVMA acknowledges cases in which dispatch by penetrating captive bolt is preferable to lethal injection for the safety of the horse and the human. Admittedly, death by captive bolt pistol is aesthetically displeasing to watch, its effect is not akin to putting the animal “to sleep.” However, anyone who has witnessed a significant number of horses being put down with chemical euthanasia will tell you that it is far from a pleasant, or even peaceful process. Many horses object to being stuck in the neck with a large needle (actually, cannulation is suggested by the AVMA to avoid mistakes), there is certainly apprehension on the part of the horse that something “not good” is happening. Horses jump and needles slip, horses don’t always react well to the drug, large volumes of pentobarbital are required so that the animal can feel the onset of its effects before it is rendered unconscious and many take multiple injections to finish the job. By comparison, shooting with a captive bolt, while not aesthetically acceptable, *is* much swifter than lethal injection and without the apprehension on the part of the animal. Dean Scoggins, DVM, emeritus extension veterinarian at the University of Illinois, calls it “the most efficient and painless method of euthanasia known.” Dr. Steve Hicks, an equine veterinarian with 33 years experience, practicing in Palestine, Texas and past president of the Texas Thoroughbred Association, says in a recent Blood Horse article, “Many veterinarians would argue that it (euthanasia by penetrating captive bolt) is more humane, as it is quicker in action with no apprehension by the animals, as there is with an injection.”

Animal rights activists portray horses at the slaughterhouse as completely terrorized, panicked by the smell of blood and anticipating something catastrophic. Observations of veterinary and animal science experts show that this is untrue. Dr. Scoggins states, “I have been to the processing plant in DeKalb (Illinois) on a least ten different occasions during my tenure at

the University of Illinois. During these visits I observed the slaughter procedure used at the plant. I have never witnessed horses experiencing any more stress than seen when going through an auction ring. Horses in line to be stunned via a captive bolt procedure show no awareness or concern for what is about to happen.

“Whatever anxiety that may be shown is similar to any horse in an unfamiliar surrounding. Animal behaviorists have not shown that prey species, such as horses, anticipate any experience they have not experienced before. The confinement of the chutes is the primary stress. They may experience that in a variety of situations other than a slaughter plant.” Dr. Carolyn Stull, a researcher with the Animal Welfare Program in the veterinary school at the University of California, Davis says about her observations of 306 horses slaughtered in a Texas plant, “The horse is in an alert posture (in the restraining chute), with its head up...it is a real quick process, it is not enduring.”

Captive bolt renders instant death

Animal rights adherents will relate horrific tales of euthanasia through penetrating captive bolt and the subsequent slaughtering process for horses. They claim that horses are stunned but conscious after administration of the captive bolt pistol, and they even show videos to try to prove this. The reality is that horses are rendered instantaneously brain dead by captive bolt, but, in the words of the AVMA, “exaggerated muscular activity can follow loss of consciousness and although this may disturb some observers, the animal is not experiencing pain or distress.” Reflex muscular activity also occurs following euthanasia by lethal injection. In a very well-balanced 1999 article appearing in *The Horse* magazine, investigative reporter Les Sellnow visited all of the US horse slaughter plants in operation at the time. His response to the claims of terror and agony in slaughterhouse deaths was, “The slaughter plants are streamlined, efficient operations. Horses are moved from holding pens to the slaughter area. A door opens, and the horse steps inside a stall-like enclosure. Within a second or two a dead-bolt devise (penetrating captive bolt gun) strikes the animal in the forehead ... the horse is instantly dead.” Investigations have been performed at horse slaughter facilities by the leading veterinary and animal scientists in the field of humane animal care², and their results report overall humane treatment of the horse while living, and their rapid, efficient and pain-free deaths.

² Grandin, T. Objective scoring of animal handling and stunning practices at slaughter plants. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Vol 212:36-39. 1998.

Humane transport is federally mandated

The other issue that the anti-slaughter activists promote as a reason to ban horse slaughter is humane considerations in the transport of horses to the slaughter facility. Horse transport is a viable consideration, and insuring humane standards in transport of horses to slaughter is of importance not only to the horse and concerned horse lovers, but to the slaughter plant itself and the horse dealers that sell horses to these plants. In the words of Dr. Temple Grandin, “The single most important factor that determines how animals are handled is the attitude of the manager.” Some animal rights activists will claim that the slaughter plant and those transporting horses to the slaughter plant do not care about the welfare of the horses, since they are destined for the killing floor anyway. This is simply not true. Regardless of how they may feel about horses and horse welfare on a personal level, these people have a financial incentive to ensure the most humane conditions possible for horses transported to slaughter. Horses and their flesh are inspected at all commercial horse slaughter plants by a licensed veterinarian under the strict guidelines of the USDA. Any meat that is damaged, bruised or lacerated is condemned. This decreases an already narrow profit margin for the slaughter plant and the transporter. It is therefore in the best interest of these parties to do their best to insure safe transport of horses to the site of slaughter.

Concern for the conditions of horse transport from a number of groups – including some of those who are currently at odds about the issue of humane slaughter for horses – prompted the development of the Safe Commercial Transportation of Horses to Slaughter Act passed in 1996. This act required the USDA to develop and promulgate regulations governing the transportation of horses to slaughter. At the time it was realized that scientifically based studies on which to base these regulations were lacking. A number of studies were consequently funded by the USDA in order to base guidelines for humane transport on science and not arbitrary or traditional beliefs and figures. The results of numerous scientific investigations of horse transport to slaughter³ have helped shape regulations now in effect. These regulations are

³ Grandin, T. Assessment of stress during handling and transport. *Journal of Animal Science*. Vol 75:249-257. 1997

Stull, CL. Response of horses to trailer design, duration, and floor area during commercial transportation to slaughter. *Journal of Animal Science*. Vol 77:2925-2933. 1999.

Grandin, T, K McGee, JL Lanier. Prevalence of severe welfare problems in horses that arrive at slaughter plants. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Vol 214:1531-1533. 1999.

extensive – the entire text of the regulations, as well as a discussion of their development, can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/congress/hh_att6.htm, or you can call the USDA at (301) 734-3297 for a free copy of *Take Care of Our Horses, Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter*. In general, these regulations provide for mandatory food, water and rest for a minimum of six hours prior to transport; trailer dimensions and design that allow adequate floor space and headroom for horses – this includes the phasing out of double decked trailers; maximum transport times and mandatory rest periods wherein horses must be offloaded to be watered and fed; complete segregation of stallions and aggressive horses from other horses and from one another; prohibition on the transport of nonambulatory horses (the horse must be able to bear weight on all four legs); complete identification of every horse included in a transport; prohibition on the use of electric prods; immediate access to food and water after offloading at the slaughter facility and USDA examination of all horses following offloading. Stiff fines of up to \$5,000 per offense (each transported horse constitutes a separate offense) can be levied.

Ironically, if the humane slaughter of horses is outlawed in the US, it may mean even more transport problems for unwanted horses. As a recent article in *Equus* magazine states, “One likelihood is that more unusable US horses will go to Canadian and Mexican slaughter plants for processing, meaning increased shipping distances and, in Mexico, little or no regulatory oversight regarding the animals’ well-being.” In acknowledgement of this problem, Donna Ewing of the Hoofed Animal Rescue and Protection Society suggests a pragmatic, albeit surprising alternative for someone in her position – that more horse slaughter plants should be strategically located throughout the US to reduce transport time for horses so destined and humanely speed the inevitable end to their lives.

There is no doubt that transportation of any kind is stressful for a horse. However, horses are transported every day throughout the US for many reasons aside from transport to slaughter. The transportation of horses alone is not the issue here; what offends the animal

Reece, VP, TH Friend, CH Stull, T Grandin, T Cordes. Equine slaughter transport – update on research and regulations. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Vol 216:1253-1258. 1998.

Collins, MN, TH Friend, FD Jousan, SC Chen. Effects of density on displacement, falls, injuries, and orientation during horse transportation. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. Vol 67:169-179. 2000.

Grandin, T, K McGee, JL Lanier. Survey of trucking practices and injury to slaughter horses. www.grandin.com/references/horse.transport.html

rights groups is that horses in this case are being transported *to slaughter*. These transport regulations demonstrate that when real horse welfare issues arise, the horse industry, veterinary and other communities can come together to form a logical solution to the problem. The fact that animal rights and some horse welfare groups are at odds with horsemen, the veterinary medical community and even other horse welfare groups over the issue of humane slaughter of horses only demonstrates that it is not a clearcut *welfare* issue at stake.

Economic considerations for the horse industry

There is no doubt that the slaughter horse industry has an impact on many other facets of the horse industry as a whole. The horse industry in the US is very large – it has at least a \$112 billion annual impact on this country's economy. In many respects, the horse industry is unique. It exists as both agricultural enterprise and as a recreational industry. Depending on the owner and the operation, a horse can be a business asset, a work implement, an investment, a recreational expenditure, a beloved companion or a pure luxury item. For most horse owners, whether a horse is considered a business asset or a friend, its value in the marketplace will be a consideration at some point in its life. Thanks to the slaughter horse market, there is currently an established floor for the market value of horses. The lowest of the low values is for the slaughter horse. Generally, slaughter prices range from \$450 to \$600 for an average riding-type horse in good flesh. If horse slaughter is banned in the US, and transportation of horses for the purposes of slaughter to other countries is also outlawed, the floor price for horses in this country will have to be set by some other group. This will not impact the value of the best horses, but the value of the average and the lowly-but-serviceable horse will decline. This may be good news to the buyers in the market, but it will spell true financial hardship to the sellers who represent a significant number of horsemen throughout this country. The average horseman struggles to earn a modest living working with the animals that they love. If the price of a basic pleasure or trail horse, or an aged kid-safe mount drops by \$200 - \$500, how can a horseman dependant on the sale of these types of horses stay in business?

Banning slaughter could end horse sales/auctions

Other horse industry businesses will be impacted or even eliminated through a horse slaughter ban. For example, small horse sale yards are peppered across the entire US. Certainly these sale yards sell all types of horses, but sales of horses destined to slaughter may make the difference between keeping the doors open or closing up shop. Obviously the horse slaughter plants will go out of business and their 200+ employees will lose their jobs. Each of the

remaining three horse slaughter plants in the US is a multi-million dollar enterprise whose revenue stream is largely reinvested into the communities in which they are located. Loss of income to some of these communities would have a noticeable negative impact on the local economy. Horse transporters that provide horses to the slaughter facilities would also be put out of work.

Perhaps an even greater consideration is the slippery slope on which horse anti-slaughter legislation will put the horse industry relative to the official designation of horses as livestock or companion animal. The animal rights groups seeking to ban horse slaughter appeal to the horse hobbyists and pet owners on the basis of the horse being a beloved family member and companion animal. Since most Americans feel strongly about eating pets, portraying the horse as a companion animal makes it easier to defend from being slaughtered for human consumption. This is clearly illustrated by the statement of Cathleen Doyle, head of the California Equine Council and one of the founders of the California “Save The Horses” campaign responsible for the passage of the horse anti-slaughter law in California: “To my knowledge, the horse is the only animal that is awash in ambiguity, sitting up there on the fence. It’s thought of as both a companion animal and as livestock. There’s no question cats and dogs are protected as pets. We don’t export them to countries that eat them.” The appropriate question to horsemen is, do we *really* want our horses “protected as pets?”

It’s better that horses be livestock, not pets

Singling out horses from other livestock species as the only ones that are banned from slaughter for human consumption designates them as something other than livestock. That “other” designation is then more easily defined as a companion animal. If horses are considered under US law as a companion species, a number of legal and financial disadvantages relative to horse-oriented businesses come into play. For example, rules governing the depreciation of horses used in breeding, racing and other legitimate business pursuits will change. This may affect the horse racing industry more than other horse businesses, and may possibly change the accelerated depreciation advantages just gained through the “Jobs and Growth Tax Reconciliation Act of 2003”. In an ironic twist of fate, officials of the Thoroughbred racing industry, for reasons too complicated to go into here, have officially supported the horse anti-slaughter legislation (this position is not necessarily consistent with the views of the rank-and-file horsemen in the racing industry).

Because of the horse's designation as a livestock animal, horse owners and breeders are treated differently by state excise and sales taxes. These advantages could be lost if horses were no longer livestock. Horse breeding may no longer be considered an agricultural endeavor, which may increase federal and state taxes for horse operations.

Other disadvantages from a designation of horses as companion animal rather than livestock include loss of USDA technical and financial support for the horse industry. The USDA does not have regulatory authority over companion animals. Therefore, regulatory control over some of the very issues that are promulgated as problematic by the animal rights groups would no longer be under the authority of the USDA. The USDA provides funds for disaster relief for farmers. Recently it provided relief for hundreds of horse breeding farms that lost an estimated \$500 million due to the Mare Reproductive Loss Syndrome that swept through the Bluegrass. In addition, the USDA is currently funding research into understanding and eradicating this problem. The USDA also funds a limited amount of scientific research into equine diseases and other problems. A designation of companion animal would remove all of this support from horsemen and the horse industry.

Livestock are generally segregated from companion animals in the eyes of the laws covering humane care and treatment. Livestock anti-cruelty laws are usually written to ensure the humane treatment and care these animals deserve while still providing for the use of the animal. If horses are legally considered non-livestock, livestock anti-cruelty laws will no longer apply. Animal Rights groups would be overjoyed with this development, since they believe that all animals, but especially companion animals, should not be asked to work in the service of Man – they consider this enslavement. Imagine the day when the act of tying your horse to your trailer during a show, trail ride or other event would be considered cruelty by means of forced restraint.

Banning slaughter will hurt, not help horses

Legislation outlawing the humane slaughter of horses would restrict the right of an individual horse owner to decide what is right and acceptable management for their own horses by banning an end-of-life option. Americans cherish their freedoms; removing a freedom is a serious business that should not be entered into on impulse. The only legitimate questions that should rightfully affect the horse slaughter decision should be: Is the practice of horse slaughter in the United States humane? There are a number of independent, scientific studies that show this to be true. Does horse slaughter serve a purpose and is it effective in its service? Banning

horse slaughter would have a deleterious impact on horses and on the business of horses. This deleterious impact is likely to emerge in several areas, including equine welfare, equine pricing, commerce and trade and the operation of horse businesses.

Banning the slaughter of horses for human consumption is not designed so much to protect horses as it is to outlaw the practice of eating horsemeat – at least horsemeat produced in the US. The Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation’s position paper supporting anti-slaughter legislation sums up the *true* reason for seeking this ban by describing “the sense of dismay and revulsion that the consumption of horseflesh evokes.” By entertaining the notion that we can outlaw the production of a specific food product simply because some find that product distasteful, we are dictating cultural norms and imposing our individual beliefs on others. In America, within the confines of the law, we don’t tell people what to believe, how to live their lives, how to treat their animals, what businesses they can engage in, or what they can or cannot eat. This legislation makes an implied moral indictment of the eating habits of other cultures. When considering the overall impact of banning the production of a food product, Americans need to ask themselves: do the perceived benefits of banning the humane slaughter of horses for human consumption outweigh the imposition of cultural dictates on a society, its infringement on personal liberties and the negative impact on trade and commerce this would create?

Banning slaughter will curtail research and education

Aside from providing a solution for tens of thousands of unwanted horses every year, America’s horse slaughter plants play a secondary role in the supply of materials for research, education and medicine that cannot be obtained elsewhere. For example, horse pericardia (heart sacs) are used for repairing human heart sacs during open heart surgery. Horse researchers in Illinois, Texas, Oklahoma, California and other states use horse tissues obtained from slaughter plants for experiments designed to improve the lives of horses everywhere. In Illinois alone, without access to horse slaughter facilities, researchers at Southern Illinois University would not have been able to perfect a new method of treating broodmares for uterine infections in order to restore their fertility. Neither would this research program be able to continue its research into solving the fescue toxicosis problem which plagues broodmares throughout the country. Research conducted on equine exercise physiology at the University of Illinois would not have been possible without access to slaughter tissues. Numerous veterinary schools and university equine science programs obtain horse body parts at the slaughterhouse for use in teaching. Horse legs, reproductive tracts and other tissues are regularly used as teaching materials for

Equine Science students at SIU, and the veterinary school at the University of Illinois uses horse tissues as practice materials in the training of veterinary students. A number of farriery schools obtain horse legs from slaughter plants to use as practice before students begin working on live horses.

Once again it will ultimately be the horse that suffers from the closing of the existing slaughter facilities. Without access to horse tissues from slaughter plants, research into critical problems affecting horses would be curtailed. Researchers and horse research programs that could survive this loss, and that would still require experimentation on equine tissues, would then be forced into the position of sacrificing their own horses in order to obtain that tissue. Animal rights groups already are having a field-day criticizing and blocking the use of animals in research. Ironically, if they succeed in banning horse slaughter, they will play a part in eliminating the very form of investigation that they are trying to promote – studies that improve the welfare of living horses without harming a living horse. Additionally, without access to horse parts as teaching tools, less well-educated horsemen and women will be entering the horse industry – and once more it will be the horse that suffers.

First horses – then beef, pork, sheep, poultry?

A voluminous and incendiary position paper on banning horse slaughter was commissioned by the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, Inc. and has been distributed on the Internet. Multiple times this white paper went into lengthy discussions explaining why the horse slaughter industry in the US is on the decline and is destined to become “uneconomical” and therefore presumably vanish in the foreseeable future. If the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation truly believes this, then why are they pushing for the passage of contentious national legislation to abolish what they acknowledge as a failing industry? Could it be because the federal legislation also opens the door to funding opportunities for horse rescue agencies like the one that funded this “independent” report? Or could it be that passage of horse anti-slaughter legislation would set a precedent that the animal rights groups could capitalize on when they move on to the beef, pork, sheep and poultry industries? Additionally, if they can convince the legislature that it is cruel to eat horses, would it be that much of a leap to also convince them that it is also cruel to race them, or compete in other events on them?

A long list of highly educated scientists, professionals and experts in the field of horses are opposed to a ban on the slaughter of horses in the United States. The true, scientifically supportable facts stand in affirmation of this stance. Those who support anti-slaughter

legislation do so out of an emotional reaction to the idea of humans consuming horseflesh, and the arguments that have convinced them of the rightness of this position are based on misinformation, scare tactics and extremism.

Experts say we *need* slaughter option

International humane slaughter expert, Dr. Temple Grandon of Colorado State University writes, “Some people do not approve of the horse slaughter industry and they would like to shut it down. This would probably be very detrimental to horse welfare. The fates of many horses would be worse if the US slaughter plants were shut down because more horses would probably go to Mexico where their welfare is likely to be much worse. Humane slaughter procedures are not enforced in Mexico. The incidence of horse neglect may increase because in many parts of the country owners would have to pay to have a euthanized horse taken to a rendering plant. Rendering plants are declining in numbers and the fee to pick up a horse carcass can vary from free to several hundred dollars. This depends of where the rendering plant is located. Disposal of horse carcasses on the farm or on one’s property is often not an option. In some states it is illegal to bury a dead horse on your property. In states where burial is legal there are still problems with frozen ground in the wintertime, which makes burial impossible. Other alternatives to slaughter, such as cremation, would be expensive. People who can afford cremation can choose it, but people who cannot afford it are more likely to sell their horse at an auction or to a horse dealer. If the horse is rideable the dealer would probably sell it for riding but if it is not rideable then it is likely to be sold for slaughter. If horses have to be shipped to either Canada or Mexico, transport times will increase even further. Some people who cannot afford to euthanize a horse may let it die from neglect. This is a slow death and slaughter would be preferable. Interviews with persons involved with the horse industry (in California) indicate that horse neglect is already a serious welfare problem in low income areas. ...It is important for horse welfare that the remaining four (at the time of this writing, now only three) slaughter plants remain open.”

Horsemen’s Council of Illinois asks you to get involved

Horsemen need to get involved with this issue in order to counter the very strong and well-coordinated efforts of the animal rights groups. There are currently two pieces of legislation that will affect Illinois horsemen. The State of Illinois is considering a bill to amend the Illinois Horse Meat Act to outlaw all methods of humane slaughter of horses for human consumption and to criminalize the possession of horsemeat for human consumption. It will

likely be re-introduced in the House of Representatives in the spring. Calling, writing or sending an e-mail to your area representatives to register your opposition to this legislation *will* matter. Whatever the bill number assigned, refer to the horse anti-slaughter legislation, and your representative will understand. Keep your eyes on the Horseman's Council of Illinois website (www.horsemencouncil.org) as spring approaches for further information regarding this legislation.

Federal legislation has been introduced into the US House of Representatives, designed to prevent the slaughter of horses in and from the US for human consumption. It is referred to as "The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act," bill # HR 857. This is scary legislation on a number of fronts, and you should become familiar with its language. You can find the text of this bill at www.theorator.com/bills107/hr3781.html. This bill is receiving a lot of pressure for passage from the animal rights groups. Horsemen need to take a stand against it. You need to contact your federal representatives to register your opposition to this bill. You can specifically address the bills' sponsors as well register your opposition. Those sponsors at present are: Representatives Sweeny, Spratt, Shays, Ford, Smith (all of New Jersey), Moran (Virginia), Costello, Isakson, Bitter, Calvert, Gallegly, Greenwood.

Please, stand up for the welfare of horses and for the continued health of the horse industry. Let your opinion be known. Don't let our horses suffer because you didn't act.

The Horsemen's Council of Illinois is a statewide coalition of horsemen working together to provide representative leadership for Illinois' diverse \$3.8 billion horse industry and to promote involvement with horses.

HCI is a non-profit corporation affiliated with the American Horse Council, the industry's national lobbying and trade association based in Washington D.C., and produces the Illinois Horse Fair held at the State Fairgrounds in Springfield each March.

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