

Responsible Horse Ownership

Alternatives to Slaughter

***Horsemen's Council of Illinois
P. O. Box 1605***

Springfield, IL 62705

www.HorsemensCouncil.org

The Horsemen's Council of Illinois presents a series of articles to explain alternatives to slaughter for horses that have come to the end of their useful lives with their present owners. It is the Council's position that while no horse owner is required to send a horse to slaughter, it is the right and duty of horse owners to make benevolent end-of-life decisions for their unwanted, unusable, unsafe or unsound horses. The Council worked successfully in the last session of the Illinois General Assembly to add language to the Equine Infectious Anemia control act which effectively eliminates the possibility of severely medicated horses from going to slaughter and further requires sellers of equine at auction to sign a written acknowledgement stating that they understand the possibility that the equine they sell may end up going to slaughter. This series attempts to help educate the horse owner on identifying the options available and to assure that the best welfare of the horse remains the highest priority of the responsible horse owner.

Responsible Horse Ownership - Alternatives to Slaughter

The question has been asked many times by horse owners, "what are the alternatives to taking my horse to auction and possibly having it end up at slaughter?" The purpose of this series is to give you, the reader, information on the alternatives to horse slaughter for horses who have come to the end of their usable lives with their present owners.

Many horses that eventually end up at the slaughterhouse are those that are no longer able to perform their job. These horses are either lame, permanently debilitated, geriatric, or have serious behavioral problems. Since these horses cannot be used, and if they cannot be maintained in a humane manner to live out their natural life, the most sensible option for these horses is euthanasia. Euthanasia can be performed by many of your local large animal veterinarians. To ensure to the safety and comfort of your animal, euthanasia should only be performed by a licensed veterinarian. You need to be aware, however, that euthanasia involves more than just making an appointment with your veterinarian. The veterinarian is only responsible for administering the lethal injection. Arrangements must be made by you for disposal of the body. By law, the body should be removed within 24 hours.



Some horse owners choose to have their horse buried either on their property or at a pet cemetery. Those owners without access to heavy equipment for earthmoving must arrange for someone to come to their property and properly bury their

horse. This will involve finding a backhoe service, and making sure that environmental and other conditions allow backhoe access to the area in which you want to bury the horse. This may be problematic during the middle of winter with heavy snows or frozen ground. Burial of a dead animal, especially one the size of a horse, must meet the requirements of the Environmental Protection Act as well as state and local ordinances. Some areas do not allow large animal burial, others have limits on the numbers of large animals that can be buried within a certain area and/or where burial can take place (how far from residences, how far from water sources, etc.).

Those horse owners choosing to bury their horse in a pet cemetery need to arrange to have the body of their horse transported to the burial site. Many pet cemeteries also offer cremation services whereby your horse can be cremated individually and the ashes returned to you or spread upon a chosen site at the cemetery.

Other options that exist to dispose of euthanized horses are composting or rendering. Composting of dead animals must be done within compliance of the Dead Animal Disposal Act. A renderer can also be contacted to come and pick up the body and dispose of it properly. Renderers must be licensed within accordance of the Dead Animal Disposal Act, and they should be able to collect the body within 24 hours.

A few of the horses that end up at slaughter are those that are functional, but their owners are no longer able to care for them. If there is a possibility that a horse can lead a useful life, there are more options for them. These include private sale, public sale with precautions or donation.

Many horses are sold privately by their owners directly to other parties – in other words, they are not consigned to auctions. This will not guarantee that the horse will not end up at the slaughterhouse, but it minimizes the chances, particularly if you can demand a price for the horse that exceeds that paid by the slaughterhouse. Many horses that are past their prime but are still serviceable in a limited capacity can make great kid or lesson horses. Finding the right potential owner for your horse can present a challenge, and requires an investment of time and sometimes money.



Demanding a minimum price (called setting a reserve) on a horse that you consign to public auction can also be a way to sell the horse and avoid the chance of it falling into the hands of a slaughter buyer. Of course, you may run the risk of the horse not making the minimum reserve bid, and be forced to take the unsold horse back home. Serviceable horses may also be donated to not-for-profit groups. Not-for-profit groups can include educational facilities and some church-associated groups or camps, boys-and-girls-clubs, therapeutic riding programs and even mounted police academies. Donated horses are most often used for teaching and research purposes, though some may be incorporated into a riding or lesson program. Make sure that you clearly understand the intended use for your horse upon donation and check on the type of care the donated animals receive. For example, horses donated to a College of Veterinary Medicine may be used for instructional purposes and euthanized following their use.

Other institutions may take the horse with the intent of selling it to raise funds for the organization. It is also important that you be absolutely candid about your horse to these institutions. You would not want to send a horse with a behavior problem to a therapeutic riding academy, for example. The donation option also comes with the benefit of a tax deduction for the horse owner, to the extent allowable by law. Of course, not every horse will be accepted by a not-for-profit institution. Facilities' size, as well as other factors, play a role in how many horses an institution will be able to support.

Some of these otherwise serviceable horses may qualify to be donated to a horse rescue facility. Horse rescue facilities are generally different from horse humane associations. Rescue facilities take in otherwise healthy horses and rehab or retrain them and then place them in new homes. Horse humane groups take abused and neglected horses, and can hopefully restore them to health and place them in another home. If choosing to donate to a rescue facility, the facility should be thoroughly investigated to ensure that it is a reputable operation. In most states, horse rescue operations are not licensed, and do not need to adhere to any state-mandated rules for care and disposition of donated animals. Many specific rules also exist at most of these rescue organizations regarding the type of horse that may be donated. For example, rescues exist for certain breeds of horses, including Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds.

Several options are available to horse owners who choose not to take their horse to a public auction and risk the possibility that the horse might be consigned to slaughter. Both time and thought need to be put into which option is best for your and your horse. This is the time to be realistic about your horse and how it fits into the horse industry. Part II of this series will take a more in-depth look at these options, including the pros and cons of each, and financial obligations.

Unwanted Horses: Alternatives to Slaughter

When a horse is no longer serviceable, and therefore of no intrinsic value to the horse industry, or if the horse is aged or infirmed to the point where quality of life is poor, it is the horse owner's solemn responsibility to decide how to dispose of the animal. Euthanasia is the most widely available and frequently utilized option to deal with unhealthy or unwanted horses. There are many euphemisms for euthanasia, and several different methods are approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) to accomplish it, but plainly stated, euthanasia is the delivery of a swift and painless end to life.

Planned euthanasia is performed by a veterinarian and should be done according to guidelines established by the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia. A complete text of the Panel's 28-page report can be found in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, Vol 218, No. 5, March 1, 2001. It can also be accessed as a PDF through the Vetgate website at: <http://vetgate.ac.uk/browse/cabi/detail/d0f7d560afdb19bda018ec192412c77a.html>).

How are horses euthanized?

Although the exact method may be dictated by individual circumstances, the most common form of euthanasia is injecting an overdose of sodium pentobarbital, a barbiturate. Ending a horse's life is never an easy undertaking, and the use of chemical euthanasia, although it has become the most widely accepted method of performing this task, is not without its drawbacks. Owners arranging for the euthanization of their horse should understand the process and be mentally and physically prepared for the procedure as well as its aftermath. Further specific information on



acceptable forms of euthanasia for horses and the pros and cons of each method can be obtained from the very well prepared website: http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vetext/INF-AN/INF-AN_EMERGEUTH-HORSES.HTML.

Euthanasia prices vary depending on the service you ask your veterinarian to perform and your locale. For example, if the horse is to be put down on the owner's property, expect to pay for a veterinary out-call as well as charges for the procedure. Charges also will vary by practitioner and area, and according to whether the horse is pre-medicated prior to administration of the sodium pentobarbital. Charges start at \$50 and can exceed \$400 in some cases.

After euthanasia what – rendering, cremation, burial?

When the horse is euthanized on the farm, disposal of the body is the owner's responsibility. Illinois regulations require that this be accomplished within 24 hours of death, and that adequate measures are taken in the interim to avoid the carcass being scavenged by local animals or wildlife. Dogs and other animals have died from ingestion of the euthanizing chemicals residing in the bodies of large animals such as horses.

There are three methods allowed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for disposal of bodies as large as horses – rendering, cremation and burial. Rendering is a service

wherein the body is reduced to useable by-products, such as meat, bone and blood meal, fats, oils and collagen, and hair and hide products. The accessibility of services and the future policies of rendering chemically euthanized horses is not promising.

Very few rendering services in the United States accept horse carcasses. According to the National Renderer's Association, there are only

about 350 total renderers in the U.S. Approximately 100 of these renderers are attached directly to meat packers and do not accept outside carcasses. Nor do more than half of the 250 or so renderers left (most collect meat scraps and kitchen grease from restaurants and other human food preparation sites). In the state of Illinois, there are only three rendering services that accept horse carcasses. They are Darling International, Inc. in National Stockyards, IL (618) 271-8190, Millstadt Rendering in Belleville, IL (618) 538-5312 and National By-Products in Mason City, IL (217) 482-3261.

Some rendering companies offer pick-up services, but many have restricted ranges and somewhat erratic schedules. For example, National By-Products offers carcass pickup within a 120-mile radius of Mason City, so its services are restricted to the middle portion of the state, although they do have some collection around the Rockford area through trucking transfer services. The cost for rendering services can vary from \$40 - \$400, depending on your location and the type of service required.

Why arrange for transporting the carcass before euthanizing your horse?

The take-home message here is to make sure that you arrange for rendering plant pickup in advance to insure timely removal of the body from your premises. At the time of this writing, no carcass pickup services or rendering plants could be located that specifically service the northern sections of Illinois. This presents a real problem for a large number of horse facilities in the northern portion of the state. Unfortunately, this realization might not come to mind until *after* a horse owner is faced with disposing of the dead horse.

To utilize rendering services that do not provide carcass pick-up, the body must be delivered to the rendering site. Transporting a dead horse carcass for any purpose will require access to a

truck with a hauling capacity large enough to accommodate a horse (half ton or more) and equipped with a hydraulic lift tailgate, or a truck and/or trailer with a winch attachment, or at least a large tractor with hydraulics adequate to lift 1,000 pounds or more.



Could euthanizing chemicals flaw rendered products (animal feed)?

During the rendering process, whole animal carcasses are ground and processed into what is called 'protein blend' that eventually makes its way into animal food.

Regulations governing the testing of the protein blend for drug, chemical and biological residues are not very specific. For example, there are no regulations governing the permissible levels of pentobarbital in rendered protein products. If done at all, testing for drug and other chemical residues in protein blend products is largely performed by the end user. Some of the premium pet food companies do some of this testing on a voluntary basis, but the FDA does not regulate residue levels of pentobarbital in particular.

All Illinois renderers stated that they presently collect very few horse carcasses. This means that at the present time so few horse carcasses make their way into rendered protein product that dilution by other animals and products makes pentobarbital residues contributed by chemically euthanized horses very low. A recent investigation done through the FDA Center of Veterinary Medicine tested for pentobarbital residues in commercial dry dog foods and did detect pentobarbital residues in several products, but in relatively low concentration (a full text of their report can be found at: www.fda.gov/cvm/efoi/DFreport.htm). It was concluded that the concentrations of pentobarbital detected in the study are unlikely to cause any deleterious effects in dogs. However, if the number of euthanized horses making their way through the rendering process increases in the future, these barbiturate residues in finished products will likely increase.

Should this occur, and should it trigger a reaction by pet owners concerning the safety of their animals' food, a likely result will be that renderers will reject horses euthanized by chemical means. This could further limit the carcass disposal options for horse owners in the future.

(Note: Euthanasia by gunshot or captive bolt, recognized as instantaneous and humane by the AVMA and used in U.S. slaughter plants, keeps euthanizing chemicals out of horses dispatched in this manner, meaning that no potentially lethal pentobarbital would enter the food chain from these horses.)

The fact that all Illinois renderers indicated that they collect very few horse carcasses suggests that most horse owners likely are burying their animals following euthanasia. Burial may be a disposal option for horses euthanized on your property, but local zoning regulations may prohibit burial. Check with your county agricultural extension office or your local board of health for the regulations in your area. If burial is allowed in your area, you must comply with the regulations of the Illinois Disposal of Dead Animals Act - 225 ILCS 610 (www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/008/00800090sections.html) regarding depth of burial, maximum number of animals allowed to be buried in a single site, and how far the burial site must be located from residential areas, water sources, and other areas of potential environmental contamination.

For example, Illinois law requires that burial must be a least 200 – 400 feet from a stream, private potable water source, or any other potable water supply source. Dead animals cannot be buried less than 200 feet from an existing residence not owned or occupied by the owner of the animal. Burial depth should be sufficient as to provide at least six inches of compacted soil cover and precautions should be taken to minimize erosion and disturbance by animal or mechanical means. The abdominal cavity should be punctured to allow the escape of putrefactive gasses.

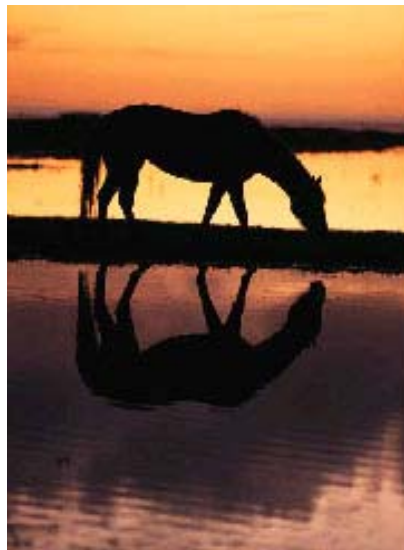
How much ground is required to bury a horse?

In order to be in compliance with Illinois regulations for burying an animal as large as a horse, you need access to a significant area of ground, and relatively few horses can be buried legally on a typical farm. For example, requirements for burial of an average 1,000-pound horse dictates a burial site of 1,000 square feet, or approximately a 32'x32' piece of land. In this area, you can bury no more than three horses total, and you cannot bury a horse on this site more frequently than once every two years. If your farm is large and you have a significant number of horses to bury over the course of several years, you cannot simply bury additional horses at 32-foot distances from the original burial site because no more than three sites can be located within a 120-foot radius of the first. All horse burial sites should be marked in some manner, because regulations require that burial sites must be made available for state inspection.

While many veterinary professionals and environmentalists have voiced concern, thorough studies of the environmental contamination potential of the actual euthanizing chemicals used on buried animals have not been performed. If this concern is acted upon, it is possible that burial regulations may become significantly more restrictive in the future.

As you can see, the logistics of burial on-site require prior planning and access to adequate land. Arrangements must be made to ensure burial of the body within 24 hours as dictated by the Illinois Disposal of Dead Animals Act. If a horse owner does not own large earth moving equipment, he or she must locate the services of a

backhoe. Your local construction company may rent a backhoe and operator by the hour, but these services may be difficult to schedule during the peak construction season. Environmental conditions may prevent or at least greatly complicate burial in some areas. Consider, for



example, the complications of frozen ground in northern locales during the winter, or saturated ground creating a standing water problem during an extremely rainy season.

If burial at home is not an option, burial at a dedicated animal cemetery may be available. Pet cemeteries large enough to accommodate horses are more difficult to locate compared to those for house pets. The International Association of Pet Cemeteries may be helpful in locating a memorial garden for horses near you (www.iaopc.com). Transportation of the body to the cemetery may be an additional problem, but some pet cemeteries offer transportation services (at extra cost). Costs for burial of your horse at a memorial garden can range from \$500 - \$1,000 or more.

Why not composting or cremation?

Composting of animal carcasses, other than horses, is allowable within strict guidelines spelled out by the Disposal of Dead Animals Act. Regulations for the composting of horses have not been included in the Act, therefore, for practical purposes, horse carcass composting is not allowed in Illinois.

Some informational websites state that some landfills will accept animal carcasses. Although this may be true in Illinois for the bodies of small animals like dogs and cats, the widespread availability of landfills for the disposal of bodies of animals as large as horses is doubtful.

Cremation is a service that may be provided off-site. Use of an enclosed incinerator that complies with the Illinois EPA regulations is required. Neither open burning nor mass burial of horse carcasses on the farm is allowed in Illinois. Mass cremation may be performed at larger equine hospitals or colleges of veterinary medicine (the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign does *not* currently provide this service). Mass or individual cremation also may be available from animal crematoriums or pet cemeteries. There are a few animal crematoriums that will provide transportation for the deceased for an additional charge. If you wish to have your horse put down at home, transporting the body to the crematorium will be your responsibility. The International Association of Pet Cemeteries (www.iaopc.com) can provide a list

of crematoriums available in your area. Cremation of your horse generally will cost \$600 to \$3,700. Many crematoriums can arrange for the ashes to be returned to you, or they can be spread upon a chosen site at a pet cemetery.

Euthanasia may be the most popular choice for dealing with the problem of unwanted, unusable or unhealthy horses, but it is not a simple one. It requires careful planning, and the details can be disturbing to some, and difficult to deal with for a bereaved horse owner. The expenses involved with euthanasia and disposal of the body following it can be significant. In the end, the responsibility falls to each individual horse owner to provide for his or her horses during life and at the end of life. Careful consideration of the options available should be made in order to choose the one that best serves you and your horse.

Alternatives to Slaughter - Unwanted Horses

Unwanted horses come from many different circumstances. Children grow up and move away from home and may no longer have an interest in their childhood companion, or may lack the resources to take it with them. Parents with newfound freedoms may be unwilling to take care of a child's horse. Some horse owners fall into financial trouble and can no longer afford the upkeep of a horse. Horses grow old and owners may decide that they cannot give the care that is needed to their geriatric dependant. Race horses and other performance horses come to the end of their competitive careers and may no longer be of value to their owners. In a perfect world, every unwanted horse would be able to find its way to a new owner who would care for it adequately until its natural demise. Unfortunately, we live in an imperfect world and unwanted horses present a difficult dilemma – a large animal requiring significant expense to maintain that can be expected to live for 25 years. Public resources for the care of unwanted horses throughout their natural lifespan are extremely limited.

What are the options for these unwanted horses? Part II of this series discussed euthanasia and the facts surrounding it. Although to some

euthanasia may seem an extreme alternative, it is certainly preferable to a life, possibly decades long, of neglect. Other options may exist for some horses looking for new living situations. One option is placement at specialized facilities designed for your particular type of horse. These horse-care facilities can fall into four basic categories: Rescue, Rehabilitation, Retirement, and Education/Charitable.

Rescue facilities are generally 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations that take in severely abused or neglected horses. Horse rescue organizations generally work with local humane societies and law enforcement to confiscate horses that are being neglected or abused. Many of these organizations exist all over the United States, and are privately run and supported through charitable donations. No centralized organization exists for this type of facilities, so it is unknown exactly how many exist in the US, but it is safe to say that at the present moment, unfortunately, demand exceeds supply. According to Donna Ewing, president of the Hooved Animal Rescue and Protection Society (www.harpsonline.org), all horse rescue facilities in the state of Illinois presently are full. The level of care and types of animals accepted by rescue agencies across the country will vary considerably. After rescue, horses are restored to health and generally put up for adoption.

Rehabilitation facilities are devoted to changing the life circumstances of usable horses, thereby giving them a new occupation and added value. Rescue facilities often have a rehabilitation function also, but not always. Rehabilitation facilities can exist to service horses that have not been abused or neglected. Rehabilitation organizations exist for a number of specific horse breeds. One of the higher-profile rehabilitation organizations is the Communication Alliance to Network Thoroughbred Ex-Race horses (CANTER; www.canterusa.org), a non-profit organization that takes retired Thoroughbred race horses and places them in non-racing homes. In

like manner, the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF, www.trfinc.org) works with the National Thoroughbred Racing Association to place ex-race horses. The Standardbred Retirement Foundation (www.adoptahorse.org) finds homes for former harness race horses, and other horse breed groups also offer breed-specific rehabilitation and adoption organizations. Horse rehab and adoption organizations often require the horse owner to fill out an application and be approved before they will accept a horse.

Retirement facilities offer a place for the geriatric horse to live out the rest of its days. These facilities vary widely in size and can support from just a few horses to 100 horses. Although retirement facilities specialize in geriatric horses, not all old horses qualify. Retirement farms generally accept only those horses that are in reasonably good health and will not require extreme veterinary care. Most retirement homes are not free. Many require a one-time donation at the time of horse placement to help cover their costs of operation. As an example, Ryerss Farm in Coventry, PA (www.Ryerss.org) requires a one-time donation fee of at least \$4,000 and the owner must sign over all rights to the horse. Horses also are required to have a current



veterinary inspection, negative Coggins test within one year, deworming within 30 days, all shoes removed and feet trimmed, and teeth floated if necessary. Horses must also be at least 20 years of age. Other retirement facilities may allow the owner to retain ownership of the horse. These facilities may require monthly or yearly boarding fees. Horse owners seeking a retirement facility for their aged equine should make sure it is the best choice for their particular horse. Retirement facilities are usually based on lots of pasture turnout and herd socialization. If your horse does not do well in these situations, this may not be the right choice for your horse. Horse owners would be well warned to prepare for this option earlier in their older horse's life. Many of the best retirement facilities have waiting lists and it could take years for a spot to open.

For some horses with the right attributes, donation to a non-profit educational, charitable or public service organization might be a good fit. Such organizations include colleges with riding, breeding, teaching or research activities, or handicapped riding facilities, not-for-profit horse camps, and even mounted police academies. In Illinois, for example, the state's collegiate Equine Science Program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale accepts horse donations (www.siu.edu/departments/coagr/animal/equine/donations). The Salem Children's Home is a non-profit child welfare agency in Illinois that accepts Arabians and half-Arabians into its ranch program (www.salemranch.com/horseprogram). For information about horses to donate for handicapped riding programs, contact the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (www.narha.org). Although few in number, Mounted Police units are always looking for a few good horses (www.mountedpolice.com/donation).

The Certified Horsemanship Association (www.chahse.org) may be able to help you with locating horse camps that accept donated horses. Before donation, the horse owner should thoroughly investigate the potential adoptive organization and learn all about their needs, policies and potential use of the horse. Be honest with the organization about the nature of your horse to ensure a good match.

No matter which of the above options are chosen, responsible horse owners must do their homework before giving up ownership of their horses. Most rescue, rehabilitation, retirement and other facilities do a great job and fill a real need in the horse industry. Unfortunately, some disreputable people and scams exist in horse adoptions. Also, otherwise well-meaning would-be rescuers can get in over their heads, with sad consequences to the horses in their care. Presently, no laws exist to regulate most of these types of horse facilities. Ultimately, it is up to the horse owner to make sure the facility they choose is reputable and well-run. The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) has produced helpful guidelines for horse adoptive facilities (http://www.aaep.org/pdfs/rescue_retirement_guidelines.pdf), but these are at present only recommendations. Facilities should have a regular deworming and vaccination program, regular farrier visits, and annual dental checkups, which are especially important for the geriatric horse.

The AAEP also suggests fresh forage (pasture) with grain supplementation only if needed. Good quality pasture should meet all of a horse's basic requirements. Horses should have access to water at all times. Shelter and fencing should also be inspected at a prospective facility. Horses should have adequate shelter while on pasture and stalls should be available for sick or injured horses. Stalls should be big enough to allow a horse to get up and down comfortably and have sufficient ventilation. They should be well-bedded and cleaned at least once every 24 hours. Pasture fencing should be well-maintained and suitable for horses. Pastures should be free of machinery and refuse.

The rescue, rehab, retirement and other adoptive homes guidelines produced by the AAEP contains a checklist for assessing these types of facilities. A horse owner contemplating donation should use this checklist to inspect potential adoptive facilities. If you decide to relinquish your ownership rights, as required by most facilities, there may come a time when your horse needs to be euthanized. Talk with the facilities veterinarian to ensure that your horse will get proper care in this situation.

There are options for horses who have reached the end of their time, either in life or with their present owner. Hopefully, the variety and availability of these alternatives will increase in the future. As with all aspects of responsible care for our horses, however, it is ultimately the owner's right and obligation to choose the option that is best for them and for their horse. In making that choice, be honest with potential owners/caretakers, be honest with yourself, and most of all be honest with your horse.

"Alternatives to Slaughter" is authored by Bonnie A. Mullinex, a graduate student at Southern Illinois University in the equine reproduction program. Bonnie works under the direction of Sheryl S. King, Ph.D., Director of Equine Studies, Animal Science Department, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. Bonnie received her Bachelor's Degree (cum laude) in biology from St. Mary of the Woods College in Indiana. Bonnie has been riding since age two and enjoys gentling horses and showing hunter under saddle and Western pleasure. She was a 4-H member for 11 years and currently is superintendent of the Edgar County (IL) 4-H and Youth horse shows program.

Alternatives to Slaughter - Assessing your horse's slaughter market susceptibility

Horse owners rarely choose to sell a horse directly to a slaughter house. Horses most often get there when an unsuspecting owner places an unwanted horse in a public auction. Many of these horse owners lack an understanding of the criteria that determine the horse's market value (or lack thereof) that may result in the horse being sold to the slaughter market. So, how can horse owners determine if horses they want to sell might be purchased for slaughter?

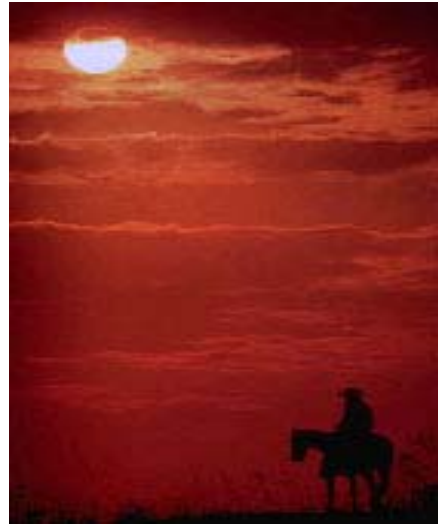
Mary Hannagan, a veteran horse auctioneer from Gordyville, USA near Rantoul IL, ranks the following criteria as the most important when evaluating a horse as a possible slaughter purchase: 1) level of soundness, 2) purpose or ability to do work, and 3) temperament. Soundness is the most critical factor when evaluating your horse because horses with special or even untreatable problems sell at a lower price due to the large medical obligations they carry with them. Secondly, the ability to do work or fulfill the purpose for which the horse is purchased is very important because purchasers buy a horse with an intended use in mind. If the horse is unable to fulfill that intended use, the purchase price will be lower and may result in the horse being sold to slaughter. Bad temperaments follow closely for obvious reasons.



Jim Tucker, general manager of Cavel International, the equine processing plant in DeKalb, Illinois,

narrows the criteria that slaughter plants use when purchasing horses: 1) weight of the horse and 2) no draft horses. The slaughter plant looks for horses that are in good physical condition and can create a profit in the meat market. The DeKalb plant does not accept draft horses because they have low yields and are not as profitable.

Although Tucker simplifies the criteria, there are legal factors imposed when qualifying a horse for slaughter.



Horses need to be able to support weight on all legs and must be free from any illness. Slaughter plants also often reject older gray horses because of their increased

risk for melanoma. Tucker explains that the majority of horses that end up at slaughter plants are “of marginal use in the horse industry for one reason or another, whether it is their excess numbers, that they are untrainable, or that they have medical problems that do not affect the meat.”

The common link between these factors is their effect on the value of the horse. When considering taking a horse to an auction, it is best to check out the current market prices for horse meat and calculate what your horse could be worth to a slaughter buyer. Then, estimate the actual value or selling price of the horse based on the criteria above. (Horse owners who do not feel qualified to judge the value of their horses may want to seek guidance from a local auctioneer.) If the projected price falls below what the horse would be worth in the meat market, then the horse is vulnerable to being purchased as a slaughter animal regardless of any other factors.

In recent years, prices for horses sold to the slaughter market have ranged from about 30 – 85 cents per pound. Such strong market prices for horse meat have not been commonplace recently, but the implication is

clear that horse owners wanting to avoid this market should investigate market prices before committing to sell a horse at a public auction.

Cavel will answer a horse owner's questions about current market prices. You need to call and explain that you might be interested in selling some horses, and Cavel will give you quotes over the phone. Their quotes assume the horses are from local owners, not contract buyers, and are given as one price per pound live weight for draft horses [lower] and another for light horses [higher] on a graded scale based on body weight and muscle score. (In late July, prices were \$0.25/lb for draft horses and from \$0.25/lb to \$0.60/lb for other horses.)

For a good-sized horse of 1,200 pounds, then, the slaughter market price might be as low as \$300 or as high as \$720, depending on the market at the time of sale. An owner of a modest quality large horse might be very surprised to learn that slaughter buyers could be willing to pay over \$600 for the horse when market conditions are very strong.

When taking a horse to a sale barn, owners can check with the auctioneer about whether or not they are willing to sell to the slaughter market. At the Arthur (Illinois) Auction Barn, for example, owners can tell the auctioneer that they do not want the horse to be sold to slaughter. In this case, the horse owner may want to place a reserve bid on the animal so it is not sold if the "critical slaughter price" is not exceeded. There may be a fee assessed by the auctioneer for a "no sale," and horse owners should clarify their position with the auctioneer before the auction begins.

Tucker mentioned that in addition, many sale barns have certain times allotted for sales to the slaughter market buyers. Owners should check with the sale barn to find out how they run their auctions and what measures

owners can take based on their willingness to sell to the slaughter market. There is no sure way to pick a slaughter buyer out of a crowd, but Arthur Auction Barn owner Marvin Miller and Tucker both agree that most experienced horse sellers know where their horses are going. Miller elaborates, "Some know just based on the horse's poor condition."

Lee Gaule, an auctioneer in the Springfield, Illinois area, encourages horse owners to "have better quality stock and know who the buyer is." At private sales and auctions when potential buyers are evaluating horses, a concerned horse owner should ask potential buyers their intentions for the horse and try get a feel for the person's sincerity in owning the horse. However, this method is not always a guarantee that the horse will go to a good home.

Author: *Debra Evans is a senior at the University of Illinois, studying animal sciences in the College of*

ACES. She is a James Scholar, majoring in pre-veterinary medicine and plans to attend vet school. Debra lives in Orland Park, Illinois, and is a novice horse enthusiast who enjoys riding Western pleasure.

Good maintenance is the best way to prevent a horse from becoming a candidate for slaughter. Hannagan stresses the importance of getting regular health and dental checks, keeping up with vaccinations and deworming procedures, and taking advantage of farrier services to help prevent problems that lead to reduced values. Better health increases the horse's chances of being purchased for work or pleasure. Hannagan elaborates, "The more you do for your horse, the better chance you will have to keep it away from slaughter."

Overall, the best way for owners to keep a horse from slaughter is to be mindful and realistic about its potential and to be familiar with procedures at sale barns they attend. It is hard to generalize a specific type of horse that is destined for a slaughter plant because horses are not chosen based on their level of soundness or behavior, but the profit that can be received from their purchase. However, owners need to understand the correlation between lameness, behavioral issues and other problems that can decrease the usefulness of their horse and make it more susceptible to purchase for slaughter.