

## Frequently asked questions about unwanted horses and the AVMA's policy on horse slaughter with rebuttal

Last month Texas Horse Talk Magazine asked the American Veterinary Medical Association for an on the record interview with its leader after the release of a document in which we found what we believe to be glaring inaccuracies based on either old data, or outright falsehood. There was no response. As a result, we asked respected slaughter researcher and writer John Holland to respond to each assertion of the rabidly pro-slaughter AVMA and its position in opposition to the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act now in congress and showing overwhelming bipartisan support. The paragraphs preceded by **Q** and **A** are the questions and answers provided by the AVMA respectively. The paragraphs preceded by **R** are the rebuttals as provided by Holland.

**Q:** What is an "unwanted horse?"

**A:** Just as the name implies, an unwanted horse is a horse that has, for one or more reasons, become unwanted by its owner. It may be a healthy horse that an owner can no longer afford to keep or feed. It may be a horse that is dangerous to handle and has injured (or is likely to injure) people. It may be a horse with an injury or illness, and the owner is unwilling or incapable of taking care of it. Some horses are no longer able to perform at the level their owner desires, whether that be for racing, pleasure riding, or some other purpose. Regardless of the reason, these horses no longer have permanent homes.

**R:** The term “unwanted” was assigned to slaughter horses by the pro-slaughter lobby and its supporters as part of an elaborate myth building exercise. We do not, for example, refer to used cars as “unwanted cars”, yet they are often sold by their owners for many of the same reasons mentioned in the answer above. The only gauge of whether something is wanted is the price for which it sells. Since slaughtered horses are not donated by their former owners, they obviously are not “unwanted” in the literal sense.

The AVMA and other slaughter supporters use the term “unwanted” because it implies that the animals must eventually be destroyed or warehoused. This is not true for the vast majority of slaughter horses. Furthermore, we have not reached the point in America where we can morally condone “the disposable horse.”

While we agree that some horses need to be put down because they are ill or dangerous, we don't believe they should be killed so that their owner may eliminate a financial burden or recoup part of a loss through the sale of the horse for its meat. We also believe that it should be done humanely and by a licensed veterinarian without subjecting the horse to the brutality of the slaughter process.

**Q:** How many unwanted horses are there?

**A:** The American Horse Council estimates there are 9.2 million horses in the United States.

We do not have reliable statistics on the total number of horses that become unwanted each year. We do know that 90,000 to 100,000 unwanted horses have been sent to slaughter annually, and that the total number of unwanted horses is substantially greater than this.

**R:** Here the misdirection and myth building begins. The statement “*We do know that 90,000 to 100,000 unwanted horses have been sent to slaughter annually*” is stated as fact. We do not know any such thing. We know only that at a particular place and time, a slaughter buyer offered more money for these horses than anyone else who had an opportunity to buy them. Special note should be made about place and time. Even the best horses run through an auction like Sugar Creek or New Holland are likely to find themselves sold to a kill buyer because these buyers have the most buying capacity at those auctions. The same horse sold on the internet or at a breed auction might bring a much larger sum. The system depends largely on the ignorance of the seller as to other selling venues.

Over breeding results in many good, healthy horses being sold at prices that are low enough to attract the killer buyers, but the very presence of the slaughter outlet perpetuates this practice by financially rewarding those who over breed their horses. If we could slaughter our way out of the problem of over breeding, we would certainly have done so by now. Only removing the reward will change this behavior.

**Q: What happens to unwanted horses? Aren't there enough homes for all of them?**

**A:** Several things can happen to unwanted horses. Sometimes these horses are lucky and find new homes with someone willing to provide them with care and attention. Other horses may be placed in equine rescue, rehabilitation, or retirement facilities. Some are euthanized by a veterinarian at the owner's request. What happens to the others? They may be abandoned, neglected, abused, or slaughtered.

Unfortunately, there are not enough homes for all of these horses. If there were, there would be no market for slaughter horses. Although there are numerous equine rescue facilities throughout the United States, these facilities simply do not have enough room or resources to accommodate the additional 90,000 to 100,000 horses *every year* that will no longer be able to be slaughtered in US plants. The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) has estimated an additional 2700 rescue facilities would be necessary in the first year of a processing ban to provide care for these horses (based on an average of 30 horses per facility). If the same number of horses became unwanted *every year*, we might need 2700 new facilities opening every year to keep up! Based on these numbers, there are not enough volunteers or placement opportunities to provide the level of care these horses would require every year. In addition, horse rescue facilities are not regulated. Although most are reputable and caring places, there is no way to guarantee that they will (or can) provide adequate care for the horses they take in. Most rescue facilities are also privately funded, and rely on donations to keep operating.

The average lifespan of a horse is 30 years. This means that rescue facilities will potentially be providing care for each horse for a significant period of time. It costs approximately \$1825 per year to provide basic care for a single horse—and that doesn't include veterinary

or farrier care. Many of these horses will require treatment or medication for chronic conditions, and the resulting costs can quickly add up.

**R:** The second paragraph above begins “*Unfortunately, there are not enough homes for all of these horses. If there were, there would be no market for slaughter horses.*” This statement is clearly nonsense. The word “market” applies to the demand, not the supply. The market for slaughter horses is set by the international demand for their meat in other countries and not the number of “unwanted horses”. Kill buyers do not go around the country like dog catchers gathering “unwanted horses” as a public service.

There is no doubt that there are truly unwanted horses and neglected horses. However, the supposition that slaughter somehow finds them and eliminates them is not supported by available data. For example, in 1989 about 379,571 American horses were slaughtered or exported for slaughter. By 2002 that number had dropped to 77,713 as a result of reduced demand for their meat. There was neither a government rescue of these horses nor a crisis of abandonment. The AVMA has never admitted the 3,000,000 horses spared by this downturn in demand were simply absorbed and that the market adjusted. Instead they produce phony scare scenarios about the number of rescues needed and the huge sums it will cost.

Moreover, the supposition that slaughter relieves abuse and neglect is not supported by the historical record. For example, on Easter Sunday in 2002, the Cavel plant in Dekalb Illinois burned to the ground. This took about 40% of the horse slaughter capacity of the US off line and there was no increase in exports while the plant remained closed. According to the AVMA, this should have sparked an increase in the rate of abuse and neglect in the US and especially in the Illinois region. Instead, the number of cases of abuse and neglect reported by the Illinois Department of Agriculture, which had doubled in the three years preceding the burning, actually started down!

The AVMA knows all this but refuses to comment on it. If the data had supported their theory they would have been publishing it. In fact, at this time the AVMA is circulating a letter requesting anyone who knows of data showing *increases* of abuse and neglect following the closure of the US plants to contact them. They did not ask for abuse data, but specifically for data that shows increasing abuse and neglect. Such a request is in itself very telling. For a professional institution to cherry pick data to support their position is completely unethical and speaks to the character of the organization.

**Q:** How is horsemeat used?

**A:** Most horsemeat produced by slaughterhouses is exported to European and Asian countries for human consumption. However, an often overlooked demand for horsemeat comes from zoos. Large carnivores, such as lions and tigers, require a lot of high-quality protein in their diets. Although their nutritional requirements can be met with other types of meat, horsemeat has more protein, less fat, less cholesterol, less sodium, and more iron than the same amount of high-quality beef.

**R:** The zoo market is inconsequentially small, and many zoos are moving away from horse meat. When the Texas ban on selling horse meat for human consumption was upheld by the 5<sup>th</sup> US Circuit Court of Appeals, the smaller Dallas Crown plant announced that they would remain in business by slaughtering for zoos. They lasted about a month before shutting down. For all practical purposes a ban on slaughter of horses for human consumption will be a ban on slaughter. Horse meat is not used in pet food in the United States.

**Q:** How many horses are actually stolen and sold to slaughter houses?

**A:** Nobody really knows how many horses have been stolen and sold for slaughter. Although some individuals and organizations claim this number is high, no data exists to either confirm or disprove such statements. We do know that horses are more commonly stolen for their value as performance or breeding animals than they are for their value as meat.

There has been lots of speculation as to how a prohibition on horse slaughter will affect the number of horses that are stolen. The number of reported horse thefts in California declined after passage of its slaughter ban, but nationwide numbers from reputable sources are not available. In addition, how many stolen horses were sold to slaughterhouses before and after horse slaughter was prohibited in California is not known and, therefore, these numbers cannot be compared to evaluate the success of the ban.

As the number of unwanted horses in the United States increases, market prices for these horses decrease. For those still transporting horses to slaughter, the cost of transportation will increase as horses are shipped across national borders. Low market price and high transport cost combine to decrease profit margins. An argument can be made that horse theft may actually increase as the result of unscrupulous people stealing horses instead of paying even the minimal auction prices, transporting them across national borders, and selling them for slaughter in other countries.

The real impact of prohibiting slaughter on the number of horses stolen nationwide remains to be seen. There are many websites in the United States that have been established to assist in reporting and locating stolen horses, but the odds of recovering a stolen horse shipped to another country are much lower. And, whereas facilities slaughtering horses in the United States routinely checked incoming horses against reports of stolen horses, this is unlikely to occur when stolen animals are processed in foreign slaughterhouses.

**R:** The AVMA would have us believe that the situation in California is largely conjecture, but there is clear data on the rate of horse theft in California following the passage of Proposition 6 in 1998 (which made slaughtering or exporting equines for slaughter for human consumption a felony). According to the California Bureau of Livestock Identification, the number of horse stolen dropped by 39.6% the year after the ban and continued downward in the years that followed. By 2005 it had decreased by almost 90%. Before the ban, horse theft had been slowly increasing.

Still, the answer above remains relatively accurate until it suddenly presents the argument that increased costs related to having to transport horses longer distances to Mexico and Canada might cause people to steal more horses rather than to buy them! Such conjecture is simply mind boggling. Does the AVMA really believe that we must protect the profits of slaughter buyers to prevent them from stealing? Then should we do the same for other forms of theft? The responsibility for theft is with the thief, just as the responsibility for each horse is with its owner. The AVMA appears to feel we must relieve these people of their responsibility and place it on our backs and on those of our horses. That the AVMA should be trying to continue one form of abuse as a protection against another is misguided at best. The organization should be lobbying for strict enforcement of theft, cruelty and neglect cases.

It should be obvious to anyone that the AVMA response here attempts to deny the obvious conclusion that hauling stolen horses over an international border is a much more risky proposition than hauling them to a local slaughter house. It is completely ridiculous to think this would encourage the act, and to wildly speculate that the closing of US slaughter houses might increase theft is an act of pure desperation.

Finally, the supposition that somehow a stolen horse had a better chance of being recovered at a US plant is also refuted by the record. The Texas Southwest Cattle Raiser's Association was tasked by state law with providing brand inspectors at the two plants and given \$3 for every horse slaughtered. They never recovered a single stolen horse alive, even though some horses were later identified by their hides.

**Q: Animal rights groups are calling you a pro-slaughter organization. Is this true?**

**A:** This is not a true statement. The AVMA is not pro-slaughter. Ideally, there would be caring homes for all horses, and there would be no market for the slaughter industry. The AVMA opposes the AHSPA because it is, quite simply, a bad bill that ignores the real issue—what do we do with all of these unwanted horses? Eliminating an option for their disposition does nothing to solve the problem, it only adds to it.

**R:** The AVMA goes beyond merely stating its opinion on the AHSPA. It one of the most effective organizations at lobbying against it and has recently hired American Capitol Group lobbying firm. The AVMA knows full well that their “unwanted horse” theory is not supported by the historical record and yet they present it constantly to the Congress. In doing so, they have violated their own Hippocratic oath and destroyed the trust of a large part of the horse community. The AVMA is clearly pro-slaughter by any reasonable definition.

**Q: Why do you say eliminating slaughter is not the answer?**

**A:** Actions by those who oppose slaughter have resulted in the closure of the last three facilities performing horse slaughter in the United States. When those slaughter plants were operating, however, those transporting horses to slaughter and the plants themselves were highly regulated. During transport all horses were subject to inspection by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors, and as of December 2006, it was illegal to

transport horses in double-decked (pot-belly) trailers. Killing at the slaughter house was performed under direct veterinary supervision.

Now that horse slaughter isn't an option in the United States, horses are transported out of the country to be slaughtered. This is a problem because the USDA has no jurisdiction in other countries, and has no power to make sure that horses are transported and killed in a humane manner. As a result, the horses are now protected by law when they are transported within the United States, but may be transported and killed inhumanely once they leave our borders.

Eliminating slaughter will not reduce the number of unwanted horses in this country. What will happen to these horses when there is no more room at the rescue facilities and no one to buy them?

**R:** The transport regulations were a fig leaf supported by the AVMA to provide cover for its pro-slaughter stance. Worse, the USDA announced that they did not have the funds or the will to enforce these laws over the highway. As a result, many kill buyers continued to use double deck trailers and only switched to single level trailers near their destinations.

The second paragraph of the answer above is one place where anti-slaughter proponents agree with the AVMA. The conditions for slaughter horses presently being exported to Mexico and Canada are horrific in the extreme. It simply cannot be allowed to continue.

Yet in the very next paragraph the AVMA reverts to their “unwanted horse” myth and does the unthinkable. The AVMA support the status quo based on a theory that they know is unsubstantiated. In other words, they support a very real and documented torture of our horses on the basis that they *might* otherwise be abandoned and neglected. And they do this despite having been proven wrong when they made the same claim in California! And they do this in the face of overwhelming historical evidence that their theory is untrue.

**Q:** But the law will prevent people from transporting horses for slaughter. Won't that prevent them from being transported to other countries for slaughter?

**A:** No, it won't. It will be difficult to enforce the law, and there is nothing to stop horse slaughter buyers and dealers from describing the horses as 'riding,' 'breeding,' or 'pleasure' horses when they are transported. Once these horses cross the border, there will be no way to determine whether they find homes or are sold for slaughter. As long as there is a market for the industry, and an ample supply of unwanted horses, they will find ways to fulfill the demand.

**R:** Again the AVMA distorts the issue. There are many things that will make it difficult for slaughter buyers to continue to export horses if the AHSPA is passed. These begin at the auctions. The anti-slaughter community is very familiar with slaughter buyers and even if new people were brought in to do the purchasing, their buying patterns would expose them immediately.

It would also be illegal to attempt to disguise the destination of a slaughter horse by sending it through “way-points” or phony business fronts. Falsifying export documents by itself is a felony, and of all the illegal commodities that one might smuggle across an international border, horses are definitely one of the most difficult.

Secondly, horses sold into Mexico for most non-slaughter purposes must pay a Mexican import duty that is twice that for slaughter horses. This alone would make the practice very unprofitable.

Finally, if the law would have no effect, then why should the AVMA be against it at all? After all, if it will not stop the exports, then none of the dire consequences they warn about would happen! Clearly they know it will effectively reduce the exports to at most a trickle.

**Q: California banned horse slaughter in 1998, and I was told that animal abuse and neglect didn't go up. Doesn't that mean a federal law would be effective?**

**A:** In 1998, California banned the possession, transfer, receipt, or holding of any horse, pony, burro, or mule with the intent to have it slaughtered for human consumption. Although the number of reported horse thefts declined following passage of the law, the percentage of animals recovered after theft also declined. Reports of animal abuse or neglect did not increase. However, there has been no investigation of the number of horses that may have been shipped out of the state under false pretense and sent to slaughter. The number of horses slaughtered in the United States declined from 1997 to 1998 (before passage of the California law), and declined further from 1998 to 1999 and from 1999 to 2000, but has increased since that time. It does not appear that passage of the California law had a substantial, long-term impact on the number of horses slaughtered nationwide; it is likely that horses were illegally transported out of California, or that horses from other areas filled any void created by the law.

This is very similar to the situation recently reported in Mexico. California banned the practice, so the horses were likely shipped out of state before they were sold for slaughter. Now that there are no horse slaughter houses operating in the United States, horses are being shipped to other countries to get around the process and the laws. As long as there is an ample supply of unwanted horses and a demand for horsemeat, horses will be slaughtered.

The real, nationwide effect of the elimination of horse slaughter on the frequency of horse abuse or neglect remains to be seen. Although the AHSPA lobby expresses certainty that cases of neglect will not increase, they have ignored the fact that the number of unwanted horses will continue to accumulate to levels we've not seen before. In so doing, they are ignoring the probability that the number of unwanted horses will increasingly overwhelm the resources available to take care of them.

**R:** This answer is one of the most extreme cases of myth building in the whole FAQ document. The AVMA's Dr. Carolyn Stull warned in her testimony to the California legislature of extreme consequences if California banned horse slaughter. The AVMA should be embarrassed and chastened by this misleading testimony that they provided concerning

Proposition 6, but instead they just keep up the continuous warning of the “unwanted horse” disaster looming.

Worse, the AVMA claims that the law had no effect in California, and attempts to prove this by referencing fluctuations in overall slaughter for the whole United States. There were no horse slaughter plants operating in California when Proposition 6 was passed. So what they are implying is that the 1% of American horses that have been slaughtered in recent years (up from a low of half that number) could not have been found without the availability of horses from California! These are just words without any logical underpinning and complete nonsense. Again, increases and decreases in horse slaughter have been entirely dependent on foreign demand for the meat and slaughter capacity.

It is obvious that a state border is a lot more permeable than an international border and there are doubtlessly some horses being taken out of California for slaughter, but the effect of the ban cannot be dismissed in light of the theft statistics. To claim that “unwanted horses” are the cause of leakage that has itself not been established or quantified is just building one myth upon another without foundation.

The final paragraph is simply the same old “unwanted horse” scare tactic repeated yet again. It completely ignores the historical record, as well as the basic market dynamics of supply and demand. Breeders will continue to over breed as long as they can be assured that they will get at least the slaughter price for their culls. Auctions will continue to promote their loose horse sales as long as they can make a fast buck by running horses through so fast that only their body condition can be evaluated by potential buyers. Slaughter promotes all this, it is not the solution. The presence of a slaughter market deprives a horse sold at a loose horse auction of even a chance to show its training, talent and temperament to potential owners.

Only a few horses are saved from the clutches of the kill buyers each year, yet some incredible animals number among even these few. The fabulous horse Ying Yang Yo that has just won the US Eventing Championship was but one of these.

**Q: Is the method used to kill the horses during slaughter humane?**

**A:** Yes. Acceptable euthanasia techniques result in a rapid loss of consciousness, cardiac or respiratory arrest (the heart and lungs stop), and loss of brain function. The penetrating captive bolt is a physical method of euthanasia. Its action is similar to that of a gun, but it does not release a bullet; instead, a steel pin is driven through the skull and into the brain, producing instantaneous brain death. It can be safer to use a penetrating captive bolt than a gun, because there is no bullet and therefore no risk of ricochet or injury to people or other animals from the bullet passing through the animal's body.

In the United States, slaughter horses were euthanatized using a penetrating captive bolt. The AVMA Panel on Euthanasia performed an extensive review of the scientific literature and determined that, when properly used by skilled personnel with well-maintained equipment, the penetrating captive bolt is a humane method of euthanasia.

Methods that may be used at slaughterhouses outside the United States may be painful and inhumane, and neither the USDA nor the AVMA has any influence or control over them.

**R:** In its 2000 report on methods of Euthanasia, the AVMA stated that the captive bolt gun should not be used on equines unless head restraint could be assured. This is because of the relatively narrow forehead of equines, their head shyness and the fact that the brain is set back further than in cattle for which the gun is intended. It is difficult for an operator to assure proper placement of the gun.

No slaughter house ever found a practical way to restrain the heads of the horses, so by the AVMA's very definition, the process was not acceptable. The result was a very large number of ineffective stuns. These misplaced blows undoubtedly caused severe pain until a stunning or fatal blow was delivered.

The AVMA has corrected this problem by removing the warning from their latest document on the subject. In other words, they are more than willing to compromise the quality of advice they give to their members if it is necessary to promote the myth that slaughter is humane euthanasia. Despite actions like this the organization continues to profess they are not pro-slaughter!

**Q: I saw a video that showed a horse that didn't die quickly after the captive bolt was fired. It looked really bad to me. Is this a common scenario?**

**A:** No, this is actually very uncommon. In US slaughterhouses, USDA inspectors (veterinarians) supervised the killing of all horses. Every federally inspected slaughter plant in the United States, including all of the now-closed equine slaughter plants, has a veterinarian and slaughter line inspectors present at all times while animals are slaughtered. The veterinarian and inspectors are required to observe, ensure correction of any errors, and report any instances of inhumane treatment of animals. Slaughter is highly regulated, and any violations of humane slaughter requirements are punished according to federal and state laws and regulations. For more information, please go to:  
[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Key\\_Facts\\_Humane\\_Slaughter/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Key_Facts_Humane_Slaughter/index.asp)

**R:** The claim that the USDA is a reliable guardian of the welfare of slaughter animals is tragically laughable. The USDA is an integral part of the slaughter cabal. When Congress attempted to force the USDA to stop horse slaughter by removing the funds for the vaunted inspectors, the USDA devised an illegal program to allow the slaughter plants to pay for their own inspections, and slaughter continued.

In a recent FOIA request for humane violations at the Cavel plant, the USDA stated that they could find no record of violations for the past two years. This despite the well publicized birth of a foal at the plant, the presence of a blind and pregnant mare in a load destined for the plant (that was involved in an accident), the detention of a truck full of brutally beaten and blinded horses headed for Cavel, and numerous other known examples of cruelty and

rule infraction.

**Q: If you're not pro-slaughter, why do you oppose the proposed legislation?**

**A:** Because the AHSPA does nothing to provide for the welfare of unwanted horses.

**R:** And so the AVMA supports the continued, well documented and tortuous deaths of these horses.

**Q: If the act is passed, what will happen to the horses?**

**A:** The AVMA's primary concern is that these horses will still be transported for slaughter, but will not be treated humanely. Recent reports of inhumane practices in Mexico underscore this concern. According to the USDA Market News Service (Las Cruces, NM), 1345 horses were transported across the US border and into Mexico for slaughter during the week of September 29, 2007. During the previous week, 1111 horses were transported across the border. For the current year, 31086 horses have crossed the border into Mexico for slaughter. Compared to last year, when 6391 horses crossed the border, this year's number represents a **one-year** increase of 486%. This number will decrease if the AHSPA passes, but only because transporters will identify another purpose as their reason for transporting horses across the border.

Transporters could claim that horses are being transported for sale as riding, working, or pleasure horses, only to cross the border and sell them for slaughter. Catching violators and enforcing the act would be nearly impossible. Transport of horses to slaughter within the United States is regulated, but regulatory authority ends when horses cross the border into another country. They may be loaded in large numbers on trailers, transported longer distances, deprived of food or water, and killed using inhumane methods.

We are also very concerned that people who previously saw slaughter as an option for disposing of their unwanted horses will be more likely to abandon, abuse, or neglect the horses. This year's severe weather has led to hay shortages that have driven hay prices to very high levels, and there is concern that people will not be able to afford to feed their horses and livestock. People may have to choose between feeding their horses and providing adequate veterinary and farrier care. If they stop vaccinating their horses or appropriately caring for them, the risk of illness for horses *and people* will increase.

**R:** Again the AVMA is saying that the federal ban will not stop the export of horses, but even so that it will cause the accumulation of unwanted horses and increase abuse and neglect. Which is it? And again the AVMA raises the issue of owners not being able to dispose of their unwanted horses.

Presently the existence of an export slaughter market enables breeders to engage in what critics call "Lotto Breeding". This is the over breeding of horses in hopes of getting that one in a million animal. The AQHA (American Quarter Horse Assoc) and the APHA (American

Paint Horse Assoc) profit hugely from this process as they receive registration fees for thousands of horses that are later dumped at auction. The same thing happens with Thoroughbreds (race horses). An end to the slaughter market will make this breeding practice far less attractive. This negative feedback explains how the market adjusted to the huge fall in slaughter during the 1990s.

Slaughter is almost certainly finished in the United States. It is highly unlikely that any company would invest in a new plant in any state where slaughter is still legal, given that a state law or the federal ban could pass long before that investment paid off. Therefore there is no serious chance that we will revert to the "good old days" of having US plants slaughtering horses. The AVMA has no power to reverse this trend, they have only the power to continue the agony of horses sent over the borders, and that they are doing in direct contradiction of their own oath! Since the AVMA appears to have forgotten this oath, it is worth restating here.

*Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge.*

*I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.*

*I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.*

**Q: I hear that horses are frequently given drugs like phenylbutazone ("bute"), and this often ends up in the meat. Isn't that unsafe?**

**A:** First, it is important to note that veterinary drugs used on horses are clearly labeled with the phrase, "not for use in horses intended for food." This includes phenylbutazone (bute). Any use of these drugs in a horse that goes to slaughter is contrary to the manufacturer's recommendations and may violate state or federal laws.

In the United States, the USDA performs residue testing on random samples of meat. In 2005 (the most recent report available online), testing for substances including bute, antibiotics, and many other chemicals and drugs revealed no violative residues (i.e., residues that were above acceptable levels). Additional testing may be performed by exporters or importers, to make sure that the meat meets the importing country's standards.

So, although this is a common argument used by horse slaughter opponents, it is just not true that all (or even most) of these animals are tainted with drugs. Information about residue testing is available at: [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/2005\\_Red\\_Book/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/2005_Red_Book/index.asp)

**R:** Horses are not raised as slaughter animals. A horse can go from the race track to the slaughter house in a day or two. There is no prescribed withdrawal period for drugs such as

phenylbutazone (a carcinogen), and there is no regimen of general drug withdrawal for slaughter horses as there is for other slaughter animals.

The AVMA's specific claim about testing results is also wrong. The following excerpt is from a response by the USDA Food Inspection Service in response to an information request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA 07-053).

*In 2004, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) conducted an exploratory project in which, among other drugs and pesticides, chlorinated hydrocarbons and phenylbutazone were analyzed in 15 randomly selected horse samples. The carcasses were held, pending the results of analyses. One horse was violative for phenylbutazone. In 2005, the exploratory project was repeated in nine horses, one of which was violative for phenylbutazone.*

If the results of this small sampling (8.3%) were extrapolated over the total of 100,000 horses slaughtered a year, it would infer that 8,300 of the horse carcasses or about 4 million pounds of meat that were exported contained this known carcinogen. To address this problem, the USDA/FSIS appears to have stopped this testing in 2006. It is not surprising that they omitted this information from their web site as well.

**Q: The AVMA said that more horses are being neglected or abused since the slaughter houses closed down. What evidence do you have to support that?**

**A:** We've already seen evidence that more and more horses are being transported to other countries and slaughtered. As we've already said, making such transport illegal will not eliminate it altogether. We've already seen evidence that more and more horses are being transported to other countries and slaughtered—this means longer rides for these horses and, as we've already said, the potential for inhumane treatment after they've crossed our borders.

So far, there have been several media reports of increases in horse neglect. Increases in horse neglect have been reported in Washington County, Virginia and statewide in Georgia. We acknowledge there are many factors at play in these situations. Recent droughts have caused hay prices to soar, and an increasing number of people are having trouble finding affordable hay for their horses. As more unwanted horses remain in the horse population, hay shortages and high costs will increase the cost of care and further deplete resources. It will cost more to care for these horses, and many rescue facilities are already financially strapped. This adds to the AVMA's concern that these animals may be more likely to be abandoned or neglected.

We are in the process of gathering data on the incidence of horse neglect across the country, and will update this document as that data becomes available.

**R:** The last paragraph is not exactly true. The very author of this document (Dr. May) has in fact sent out a letter requesting information about any documented *increases* in abuse and neglect. Here are her exact words from that letter:

*However, have any of your constituents observed increased rates of horse neglect or abuse over the past few months? If so, we would greatly appreciate any statistics that back this up*

*(the appropriate organizations will be credited).*

For a professional organization to ask specifically for data that agrees with its position and not all data is unconscionable, unprofessional and deceitful and yet another violation of their oath. This statement alone proves that the AVMA is distorting the facts.

**Q:** You're worried about increases in abuse or neglect. Aren't there laws to prevent that?

**A:** Every state has laws that define animal abuse and neglect; penalties often vary from state to state. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to enforce these laws unless an animal is already suffering or near death. In addition, many states lack the manpower necessary to monitor and investigate neglectful and abusive situations. Very few, if any, states have set aside parts of their budget to provide for the care of seized horses.

**R:** The answer contains another telling statement:

*Unfortunately, it can be difficult to enforce these laws unless an animal is already suffering or near death.*

In other words, it appears the AVMA is saying that it is important to slaughter horses *before* they become abused and neglected!

Additionally, this year the Texas Legislature toughened its laws on animal cruelty but left in place an exemption for livestock. An attempt to get horses included under the enhanced protection was defeated by the agricultural interests with support from the AVMA.

**Q:** The AVMA says banning horse slaughter isn't the answer. So, what is the answer?

**A:** Simply put, there will be no demand for slaughter if there are no unwanted horses. The key to solving the problem doesn't lie in eliminating slaughter—it lies in responsible horse ownership. If everyone who purchased or bred a horse accepted the responsibility of caring for that horse throughout its entire life, or finding another person to do so if the original owner is unwilling or unable, there would be no more unwanted horses. Breeders, horse organizations, and horse owners should all be aware of the possible fates of unwanted horses, and should make a conscious effort to educate themselves and the public about responsible horse ownership.

Organizations supporting the AHSPA are spending millions and millions of dollars lobbying for this bill. If even some of that money was diverted to providing adequate care and housing for unwanted horses, many of these horses could escape the fate these organizations are pushing so hard to eliminate.

**R:** Again the AVMA repeats the absurd notion that the demand of horse meat is caused by the presence of “unwanted” horses! It is absolutely breathtaking that a professional

organization such as the AVMA could make such a clearly fallacious assertion. Then how ironic it is that after repeatedly making statements that take the responsibility for horse theft off the shoulders of the thief and the responsibility for neglect off the shoulders of the owners and breeders, the AVMA states that everything would be fine if people would just assume responsibility! That is clearly not realistic and they know it.

The only way to stop excessive breeding is to take away the financial incentive that slaughter provides and then to back rigid enforcement of existing cruelty laws. We cannot wish our way out of abuse and neglect any more than we can slaughter our way out of it.

**Q: I want to donate money to help these horses. How can I help?**

**A:** Many rescue facilities are at risk of closing their doors due to inadequate funding, and their closures may add to the unwanted horse problem. We suggest that you carefully evaluate any charity organization to see how they use the donated money, and make sure that your donations are used in a manner consistent with your expectations. For an overview and some guidelines on selecting a horse rescue charity, go to [http://www.unwantedhorsecoalition.org/resources/WilliamsPape\\_AAEP.pdf](http://www.unwantedhorsecoalition.org/resources/WilliamsPape_AAEP.pdf) (PDF, 44Kb).

**R:** (See next rebuttal).

**Q: Where can I go for more information?**

**A:** The AVMA is a member of the Unwanted Horse Coalition (UHC). The UHC is dedicated to reducing the number of unwanted horses and improving their welfare through education and the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety, and responsible care and disposition of these horses. Please visit their Web site at: <http://www.unwantedhorsecoalition.org/>

The Animal Welfare Council has produced a report entitled "The Unintended Consequences of a Ban on the Humane Slaughter (Processing) of Horses in the United States." This report, prepared by experts in animal science, economics, and business, provides an overview of many of the overlooked consequences of the elimination of horse slaughter. Facts from this report were used in the preparation of this document. The document can be found at: <http://www.animalwelfarecouncil.com/html/pdf/consequences.pdf> (PDF, 80Kb)

**R:** The Unwanted Horse Coalition appears to have been founded primarily to push forward the "unwanted horse" theory and to continually equate slaughtered horses with unwanted horses. It was started by the AVMA. Following the initial meeting, most of the real animal rescue organizations resigned leaving mostly pro-slaughter organizations.

The Unwanted Horse Coalition ended meaningful participation by many rescue organizations by imposing a \$5,000 fee to join. Most rescues would rather spend their funds on feed, hay, and veterinary care. It was recently transferred to the control of the American Horse Council and it remains to be seen if it will fill a real and useful purpose now, but its staff is so

saturated with slaughter proponents that it is unlikely to be anything more than another propaganda organ.

The Animal Welfare Council is even worse. It is comprised of nearly 20 industry trade groups representing the interests of rodeos, livestock producers, circuses and carriage operators, among others. The AWC's interest in the welfare of animals is specious at best. Their true mission is to protect their industries, horse slaughter and the status quo. Even their name appears to be designed to cause confusion with the Animal Welfare Institute (a strong anti-slaughter organization). That the AVMA attempts to use the AWC as an example of a legitimate horse welfare think tank shows just how desperate they are for real evidence to support their claims about unwanted horses.

The paper "The Unintended Consequences of a Ban on the Humane Slaughter (Processing) of Horses in the United States" was indeed signed by eight PhDs and an MBA. Many of these individuals worked for Texas A&M University, an institution that received \$2 for every horse slaughtered in Texas!

Also among the authors was Dr. Carolyn Stull. She represented the AVMA position in testimony before the California legislature when they were considering banning horse slaughter in 1998. As already discussed, in her testimony she predicted a statewide epidemic of abuse and neglect if the bill passed. Several years after its passage, she candidly admitted that there was no evidence of any increase in neglect in the state. For her to then coauthor this embarrassing apology for horse slaughter is hard to fathom.

For the most part the paper is a collection of many of the distortions already discussed above, but it does have its entertaining elements. At one point it warns of the dire consequences that a ban on horse slaughter would have on our diplomatic relations with the French government! Perhaps the most telling mistakes occur in the only attempt in the paper to do any kind of hard science (or at least middle school math).

Table 2 is a simple attempt to predict the cost of keeping the horses slaughtered over a six year period. Despite its simplicity, it contains several amateurish mathematical mistakes. For example, instead of carrying forward 80% of the horse population (survival rate) year-to-year, it carries forward 80% of the accumulated cost. It also accumulates horses at the end of each year instead accounting for their influx over the course of the year.

It is bad enough that the whole supposition of the table is unfounded, but how is it possible that 8 PhDs and an MBA could make such elementary mistakes? The most plausible explanation is of course that the paper was written by a staffer at the AWC and merely signed by the "authors" to give it gravitas.

The AWC and its "experts in animal science, economics, and business" are reminiscent of the wonderful work of the Tobacco Institute in the 1960s and 70s. That esteemed institution managed to stave off legal disaster for years by hiring legions of PhDs to spew out pseudo scientific papers disputing the ill effects of smoking.

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