

[F A C T S H E E T]

Support the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (H.R. 503 / S. 311)

Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Ed Whitfield (R-KY), John Spratt (D-SC), and Nick Rahall (D-WV) have introduced H.R. 503 and Senators Mary Landrieu (D-LA) and John Ensign (R-NV) have introduced S. 311 to ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption (including the export of horses for slaughter). In the 109th Congress, the House cast 6 votes on this issue – all overwhelmingly against horse slaughter. In September 2005, the Senate passed a funding limitation amendment to ban horse slaughter by a 69-28 margin. Last fall, this bill to ban horse slaughter permanently passed the House in a landslide, bipartisan vote of 263-146. It is time to enact a permanent ban on horse slaughter. In April, the Senate Commerce Committee passed S. 311 by a 15-7 vote. In May, the state of Illinois enacted a ban on horse slaughter, shutting down Cavel International, the last operating plant in the country. Cavel International has sought to delay its inevitable closure by obtaining a temporary restraining order and that issue is before a federal court in Illinois. The two foreign-owned plants in Texas stopped killing horses for human consumption when the Federal 5th Circuit Court determined that a 1949 Texas state law had outlawed horse slaughter for human consumption. The Supreme Court recently denied a cert petition submitted by the horse slaughter plants on this decision. With the U.S. plants closed, horses are transported long distances to Mexico and Canada, making the need for a federal ban on slaughter/export especially urgent.

Horses are our trusted companions and have never been raised for human consumption in America. A symbol of grace and beauty, horses have contributed greatly to our society throughout history. They have carried us into battle, plowed our fields, and been endless sources of inspiration and beauty. Americans hold horses in high esteem and believe they deserve respect and dignity. National polls show that 70% of Americans strongly favor a ban on horse slaughter for human consumption. However, American horses are being killed for foreign gourmands in Italy, France, Belgium, and Japan. Show horses, pony ride ponies, racehorses, foals born as a “byproduct” of the Premarin© industry, wild horses, carriage horses, and family horses are victims of the horse slaughter industry. More than 100,000 American horses were slaughtered for human consumption in foreign countries in 2006 at one of the three, foreign-owned horse plants in the U.S. Another 30,000 were sent to Mexico, Canada, or Japan for slaughter last year.

Many horses slaughtered were stolen or sold to killer buyers unwittingly or illegally. Horses are often unknowingly sent to slaughter, including those stolen and sold for a profit. Logs from all three plants show that 386 wild horses (with BLM brands) were slaughtered as of January 1, 2005. Many domestic horses are stolen out of pastures and barns every year for the horsemeat trade. Ohio newspapers recently reported on the theft of two prized former racehorses whose owner had been planning to retire them to an equine sanctuary. Instead, two horse thieves sold the animals for \$250 each to an auctioneer, who then sold them to a killer buyer employed by one of the three foreign-owned horse slaughterhouses. Sky Dutcher, another victim, came to Washington, D.C. recently to tell the story of how her horse, Cimarron, was stolen from his corral on her 12th birthday and sent to slaughter within two days. When California banned horse slaughter in 1998, the horse theft rate dropped 34%. Horses sold at auction and purchased by killer buyers are not sent there intentionally -- their former owners do not know their fate. Slaughterhouse operators want everyone to believe that all the horses they slaughter are old or injured. In truth, USDA statistics show that 92.3% of all horses sent to slaughter arrive in “good” condition – meaning they are sound and in good health.

Transport to slaughter is grossly inhumane. Horses are shipped over long distances to Texas or Illinois to one of the three foreign-owned slaughter plants – or to Mexico or Canada. Transport regulations allow grossly inhumane conditions – severely injured horses (broken limbs, missing eyes, etc.) or even heavily pregnant horses may be trucked for more than 24 hours with no food, water or rest in extreme heat or cold. On the exact day that a BelTex horse slaughterhouse representative testified in 2006 before the House Agriculture Committee that horse transport is humane, a trailer of seriously injured horses traveling from Mississippi to BelTex was detained by police when it stopped to repair a flat tire. Tire shop employees had called the police out of concern for the horses stating, “It looked like someone took a baseball bat and beat the hell out of the horse.” Terrified horses and ponies are crammed together and transported to slaughter in trucks designed for cattle and pigs. The truck ceilings are so low that horses are not able to hold their heads in a normal, balanced position, and inappropriate floor surfaces cause slips and falls, and resulting trampling.

Horse slaughter is a grim and painful death. Under federal law, horses are supposed to be rendered unconscious prior to slaughter, usually with a captive bolt pistol which shoots a metal rod into the horse’s brain. Conditions in the slaughterhouse are extremely stressful and frightening for horses; their instinctive flight response in stressful conditions makes it difficult to accurately stun them prior to slaughter. Undercover footage has shown that some horses are conscious when they are shackled and hoisted by a rear leg to have their throats cut. Death at the slaughterhouse is not euthanasia – it is a brutal and terrifying end for horses.



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Myths and Facts Regarding Horse Slaughter

Myth: This legislation will lead to an increase in unwanted horses and resulting horse abuse and neglect.

Fact: A ban on horse slaughter will not lead to an increase in unwanted horses or abuse and neglect. In California, where horse slaughter was banned in 1998, there has been no corresponding rise in cruelty and neglect cases, though horse theft dropped by 34% after the ban. Allowing one's horse to starve is not an option – state anti-cruelty laws prohibit such neglect. Most horses that go to slaughter are not unwanted, but rather wind up in the hands of killer buyers by happenstance. USDA statistics show that more than 92% of horses slaughtered are in good condition and able to live productive lives.

Myth: There is no need for this legislation because slaughter is humane euthanasia.

Fact: Horse slaughter is a far cry from humane euthanasia. "Euthanasia" means a gentle, painless death provided in order to prevent suffering. Horse slaughter is a death fraught with terror, pain, and suffering. Horses are shipped for more than 24 hours at a time in crowded double-deck cattle trucks without food, water, or rest. Pregnant mares, foals, injured horses, and even blind horses must endure the journey. Once they arrive, their suffering intensifies – undercover footage obtained by The HSUS demonstrates that conscious horses are shackled and hoisted by the rear leg and have their throats slit. Because horses are skittish by nature, it is particularly difficult to align them correctly and ensure that the captive bolt stun gun renders them unconscious. When no other option exists, unwanted horses should be humanely euthanized by a licensed veterinarian rather than placed on a truck, cruelly transported and then butchered. The vast majority of horse owners (99%) already use humane euthanasia for their old or ill horses.

Myth: Transport guidelines prevent harm to horses shipped to slaughter.

Fact: The 2002 guidelines are quite weak and allow horses to be shipped for more than 24 hours without food, water or rest, with broken limbs, with eyes missing, even heavily pregnant. Further, the regulations cover only the final journey to the slaughterhouse, so if horses are loaded and unloaded at various places as part of their route to slaughter, only the final leg of the trip is covered. Since the enforcement of these guidelines occurs only after the truck reaches the slaughter plant, these guidelines have little preventative effect and allow extreme suffering in transport to continue.

Myth: Banning horse slaughter undermines private property rights.

Fact: Horses are often unknowingly sent to slaughter, including those stolen and sold for a profit. Many domestic horses are stolen out of pastures and barns every year for the horsemeat trade. Ohio newspapers reported earlier this spring on the theft of two prized former racehorses whose owner had been planning to retire them to an equine sanctuary. Instead, two horse thieves sold the animals for \$250 each to an auctioneer, who then sold them to a killer buyer employed by one of the three foreign-owned horse slaughterhouses. Sky Dutcher, another victim, came to Washington, D.C. recently to tell the story of how her horse, Cimarron, was stolen from his corral on her 12th birthday and sent to slaughter within two days. When California banned horse slaughter in 1998, the horse theft rate dropped 34%. Further, private property rights do not grant owners the unfettered right to abuse their animals. Every state has anti-cruelty laws that mandate protections for animals. Michael Vick would love to claim that his private property rights protect him from an indictment for dogfighting, but that is clearly not a justification for harming animals. Owners will still have ample legal options of reselling, donating, or euthanizing their horse (costs approx \$225 – the amount of one month's keep for a horse).

Myth: Ending horse slaughter will cause environmental harm because there will be so many carcasses in need of disposal.

Fact: USDA documents that more than 92% of horses that go to slaughter are in good condition – they will not need to be euthanized. Hundreds of thousands of horses are safely disposed of annually by means other than slaughter, and the infrastructure can easily absorb an increase in numbers. Conversely, the operation of the horse slaughterhouses has a very real negative environmental impact, with all three in violation of local environmental laws related to the disposal of blood and other waste materials.

Myth: If this legislation is enacted, the federal government will face the financial burden of care for horses no longer going to slaughter.

Fact: This assertion rests on the false premise that all horses currently going to slaughter would become the financial responsibility of the federal government. Horse owners, not the government, will remain responsible for the care of their horses. Owners who no longer wish to keep their horses and who cannot sell or place their horses in a new home will have the option of humane euthanasia. The average cost for veterinarian-administered euthanasia and carcass disposal – approximately \$225, the cost of one month's care – is simply a part of responsible horse ownership.