

Fact Sheet

Horse Slaughter – Myths and Facts

Myth: 100,000 unwanted horses annually will be exposed to potential abandonment and neglect because of the cessation of horse slaughter in the United States.

Fact: There is absolutely no basis for this claim. Humane Society of the United States staff frequently attend horse auctions around the U.S. to monitor conditions and the overall status of the horse market. Representatives recently attended one such auction in Indiana and found horse sales to be brisk, with all riding horses bringing several hundred dollars or more. “Loose” horses (those led or run through the auction with no rider) were being bought by kill buyers (buyers of horses for export for slaughter) who were outbidding horse rescue workers, wanting to spare the horses from slaughter by providing rehabilitation and re-homing. This scenario is repeated on a weekly basis across our country. It is totally disingenuous to claim that the horse rescues are full, or that there are no homes for any horse that has the misfortune to end up in the hands of a kill buyer. The US Department of Agriculture documents that 92.3% of horses slaughtered are in good condition; these animals could live productive, useful lives if not for the profit motive of kill buyers and slaughter plants. Hay prices and drought have been cited as causing neglect of many large animal species in recent months, however those are distinct issues that have no bearing on whether horses should be sent to slaughter for human consumption.

Myth: Unwanted horses compete for adoption with the 32,000 wild horses that are currently fed and sheltered at a public expense of \$40 million.

Fact: Those wild horses currently housed at Bureau of Land Management (BLM) holding facilities do not compete whatsoever for adoption: they are there *precisely because they are not adoptable, per BLM's own criteria*. Those horses are not even being offered for adoption.

Myth: The slaughter of horses for human consumption abroad is simply a form of “harvesting.”

Fact: Horses are not raised in America to be eaten – they are not a “crop” to be “harvested”, like chickens, soybeans or ears of corn. They are raised as companions of mankind – in work, sport and recreation. Proper horse care dictates that they are frequently administered drugs and medications clearly marked “Not To Be Used in Animals Intended for Human consumption” – products that are either known to be carcinogens or which were not required by federal regulators to be tested for their effect on humans, precisely because the animals to which they were being administered (horses) were not intended for human consumption. The American public does not accept the eating of horse meat, any more than it would accept the eating of its dogs or cats – even though in other cultures these animals are considered a normal part of the human diet. In survey after survey, American voters reject the concept of horse slaughter for human consumption.

Myth: Horse slaughter is a tightly regulated form of “euthanasia.”

Fact: Although regulations were in place to oversee the foreign-owned horse slaughter plants operated in the U.S., those regulations were frequently violated. USDA documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act clearly state that plant workers whipped and prodded horses in violation of federal Humane Handling regulations, causing them to fall and flip over backwards. The method used to render the horse unconscious (before killing by slitting its throat and bleeding it to death) was the captive bolt gun. This stunning method was dependent on being able to accurately drive the captive bolt into the brain with one hit. Horses are especially difficult to stun using this method due to their flight response while under stress, and The Humane Society of the United States has documented footage of horses being incorrectly stunned by repeated blows of the bolt gun to the head and body – a process which can only be described as animal cruelty. It certainly was not humane euthanasia, and was not performed in any manner that an equine veterinary practitioner would use to euthanize a horse. Further, with so few horses sent to slaughter, and therefore so few horse slaughter plants operating in recent years, horses were transported vast distances under grim and inhumane conditions. The transport of horses to slaughter too frequently results in injury or even death to the animals. Horses going to slaughter are crammed into trucks intended for cattle, often without adequate space to hold their heads at a natural angle and therefore vulnerable to falls on slippery metal floors and trampling by other horses. They travel thousands of miles, for more than a day at a time, under harsh conditions and in hostile herd environments, injured, wounded and sometimes killed in falls, fights, and by other hazards of transport such as trailer accidents. Once at the plant, they are herded through pens and subject to kicking and fighting until they reach the kill floor. There is nothing about the transport or process of slaughtering horses that even closely resembles humane euthanasia.



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