

Equine Industry Issues

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“Hot Issue” - Horse Slaughter Legislation HR 503 and S311

Federal legislation has been proposed to amend the Horse Protection Act of 1970 to prohibit the shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling, or donation of horses and other equines to be humanely slaughtered (processed) for human consumption, *and for other purposes*.

In 2006, the same bills were introduced in Congress. HR 503 passed in the House, but S311 never made it to the floor of the Senate. Both bills are currently in committee but are not yet scheduled for debate (GovTrack.us.2007). In 2006, the House Committee on Agriculture overwhelmingly rejected the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act by a vote of 37-3.

The legislation is being promoted by two animal rights groups – the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2006 more than 100,000 horses, mules and other equids were slaughtered in federally inspected plants in the US. Some additional animals were exported to Canada and Mexico for slaughter. The meat was sold to zoos in the US and was shipped to other countries for human consumption. This accounted for approximately \$26 million in export revenue.

In an earlier attempt to halt horse slaughter, the legislature amended the USDA 2006 appropriations bill to eliminate federal funds for inspection services at slaughter facilities. Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, horse slaughter must be inspected by USDA personnel. The hope (of anti-slaughter groups) was that the loss of federal dollars for inspection would, in essence, cause the plants to close. The plants went to a fee based inspection system and continue to operate with USDA personnel on-site.

Real Issue – Unwanted Horses and End-of-Life Options

According to the Horse Welfare Coalition, an alliance of more than 200 prominent local, state and national organizations, 70,000 – 90,000 unwanted horses are abandoned or neglected each year in the US. Privately funded rescue facilities for horses are overrun, and there are no public dollars to support these facilities. Horse owners need to make informed decisions for dealing with end-of-life issues and unwanted horses. It is an emotional issue, no doubt, but should be supported by facts in order to avoid significant, unwanted consequences.

Closure of the processing plants, according to the Horse Welfare Coalition’s findings in 2006, could result in 90,000 additional unwanted or abandoned horses each year in the US. With an estimated cost of \$2,340 per year, per horse (not including farrier and veterinary care), the expense for these horses in the first year alone is estimated at \$127 million (North et al. 2005).. Based on current numbers and existing facilities, an additional 2,700 rescue/adoption facilities would be required in the first year (AAEP) to handle the influx of horses likely resulting (in the event of a slaughter ban). There are no provisions in the legislation for care of the horses that could be abandoned or neglected as a result. Even HSUS, a promoter of the bill, says the standards at existing “adoption” facilities are less well established than cat and dog shelters.

Disposal of 70,000 unwanted horses would be more challenging than disposal of the millions of unwanted dogs and cats euthanized each year. Burial of horses is illegal in many states. Landfills are not a good

option. Rendering, incineration, composting are potential solutions, but those options aren't available in every county and state. There is little or no salvage value in any of these methods, simply additional cost to the owner, or the tax payer if the animals are abandoned. Without the option or economic incentive to process horses, the number of neglect cases could double or triple in local communities. Processing plants serve a vital function in assuring a humane, federally supervised end-of-life option for unwanted horses.

Unintended Consequences

A consortium of equine industry experts from universities across the US prepared a white paper on the unintended consequences of a ban on the humane slaughter (processing) of horses in the United States for the Animal Welfare Council in May of 2006. The paper in its entirety can be viewed by visiting www.commonhorsesense.com and clicking on the link. In summary, loss of the option of harvesting horse flesh will potentially substantially increase the number of abandoned or unwanted horses, overwhelming the currently saturated animal rescue facilities. Cost of maintaining unwanted horses accumulates over time and will total in the hundreds of millions each year. The Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program could be negatively affected as more horses would compete for adoption. Horse owners will receive lower prices for their horse by approximately \$304 per head. Local and state governments will have increased costs associated with regulation and care of unwanted or neglected horses. Proponents of the bills have not addressed the inevitable costs of such a ban.

Horse owner responsibility

Make informed decisions about the issues that impact the industry of which you are a part. Before you purchase a horse, be sure that you have considered the total cost of that decision. Have a long range plan and consider end of life issues before you invest in ownership. Consider adopting 1-5 unwanted horses and caring for them until they die of natural causes. Investigate carcass disposal options and costs in your local area. Before you breed a mare, be as certain as you can that you are making a positive contribution and don't be guilty of frivolous breeding.

References:

<http://commonhorsesense.com>

<http://www.animalwelfarecouncil.com>

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-311>

North, Michael S., DeeVon Bailey and Ruby A. Ward, "The Potential Impact on the Proposed Ban on the Sale of U.S. Horses for Slaughter for Human Consumption." Journal of Agribusiness. 23:1 (2005)1-17.