

FACTS ABOUT OUR FOOD

~ HORSE SLAUGHTER ~

OVERVIEW

Horse slaughter is a serious concern in Canada because of the pain and suffering caused to horses during transport and slaughter. The United States has banned the slaughter of horses for human consumption which means many horses are shipped to Canada and Mexico for slaughter. The meat is sold in Europe and Japan, and to a lesser extent, Quebec.

THE STRESS OF LIVE TRANSPORT

Transportation of live animals is one of the most stressful and cruel aspects of the animal agribusiness industry. It is legal in Canada to transport horses 36 hours without water, food or rest, in addition to a five-hour pre-transport food withdrawal period. Animals shipped long distances suffer extreme stress and often suffer pain, injuries, thirst, hunger, cold, overheating and exhaustion. The live export of horses from the U.S. to Canada and Mexico has increased exponentially since the closure of U.S. horse slaughter plants in 2007.

Despite being illegal, horses destined for slaughter are often tightly packed onto double-decker trailers. These trailers are inappropriate since they don't permit horses to have their heads in a natural position, forcing their necks to be bent the entire journey. Other violations include horses being transported with metal horseshoes still attached (creating risk of trampling and kicking other horses), injured horses not being separated, and pregnant mares transported too close to term. Inspections at the border are not adequate and too often, truckers are not stopped and fined for transport violations, causing violations to persist.

Due to the poor transport conditions, many horses are injured on arrival at the slaughterhouse, and some are dead.

THE CRUELTY OF SLAUGHTER

The horse slaughter industry perpetuates the misconception that slaughter horses are dangerous, sick or elderly. While some horses fall into this category, they are the exception, not the rule. Horses commonly slaughtered include unsuccessful race horses, ill or lame horses who were someone's pet, surplus riding school and camp horses, mares whose foals are not economically valuable, and foals who are "by-products" of the Premarin and Prempro industries. Ponies, mules, and donkeys are also slaughtered. Many horses purchased for slaughter are healthy and purchased for only a few hundred dollars or less. Some people seeking to profit from the boom in horse slaughter in Canada even breed horses for slaughter.



Former pet horses transported 18 hours from Manitoba to Alberta for slaughter on an extremely crowded trailer

Once horses reach the slaughterhouse, they are held on the truck until they are transferred to dirty, barren pens where they are mixed with other horses, and where they wait their turn to be slaughtered.

During the slaughter process, horses are subjected to rough handling and abuse as they are forcibly moved through slaughter facilities by workers who use electric prods or whips. Horses are driven into a chute which leads to a holding

stall, or “stun box.” As animals with a keen sense of smell, they often exhibit signs of stress and panic when they hear and smell horses ahead of them being slaughtered.

In the stun box, horses are shot in the head, often repeatedly, with a captive bolt pistol which drives a four-inch spike into their skull. With each ineffective shot, horses writhe, legs buckling under their weight. Undercover footage of one Canadian slaughterhouse showed horses repeatedly attempting to stand up or move away after being hit. The shot to the horse’s head is meant to stun the horses for the kill process, where they are bled to death. Horses should be incapacitated before being caught by a hind leg and hoisted into the air where their throat is slit and they are dismembered. However, horses are often not stunned properly, subjecting them to the agony of being bled to death while still conscious. The short distance between the bleed-out area and the dismembering area in one Canadian horse slaughterhouse means horses may be conscious while having their feet cut off, according to Dr. Nicholas Dodman, Section Head and Program Director of the Animal Behaviour Department of Clinical Sciences at Tufts University, who viewed and assessed the undercover video footage. Dr. Dodman estimated that fully 30% of horses were not rendered unconscious at one horse slaughter plant in Saskatchewan.

To make matters worse, at least two horse slaughter facilities in Canada are designed for cattle, so walls of the stun box do not shield the view from other horses waiting. Horses waiting in line are forced to witness the horse in front being shot.

PREMARIN and PREMPRO

Premarin and Prempro are hormone replacement drugs used to treat menopausal symptoms. The name Premarin comes from “Pregnant Mare Urine” (PMU) since the estrogen extracted from the mares’ urine is the primary active ingredient in the drug.

Urine is taken from thousands of pregnant mares kept on approximately 100 PMU farms in Canada and the U.S. Their urine is shipped to a processing plant at Ayerst Organics, in Brandon, Manitoba -- a division of Wyeth-Ayerst. (In early 2009 Wyeth-Ayerst was bought by Pfizer, the world’s largest pharmaceutical firm.)

For most of the mare’s 11-month pregnancy, she is confined to a standing stall, aptly named, as the stalls are so small the mare cannot comfortably lie down, turn around, or groom herself. The mares must wear a urine collection bag, strapped to their backs and legs, at all times. These bags can cause itching, chafing and lesions with no relief. Access to drinking water is deliberately restricted to produce more concentrated urine. After the mare’s foal is born, she is re-impregnated and the cycle begins again, and may continue for 12 or more years.

Recently, use of Premarin and Prempro has been declining as doctors become aware of adverse side effects, including increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and breast cancer. A consequence of the drugs’ reduced use, many PMU mares are no longer wanted, so are auctioned for slaughter.

FATE OF PMU FOALS

Premarin and Prempro farms produce thousands of foals a year, a by-product of the PMU industry. PMU mares are put out on pasture to give birth, but many foals die due to cold weather and lack of shelter. Surviving foals may replace their mothers on the PMU production line or be sold at auction. Most are sold to “kill” buyers who fatten the foals at feedlots for later slaughter. A few lucky ones are placed as companions by rescue organizations.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Write your Member of Parliament requesting legislation to ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption, and the import and export of horses for slaughter.
- Inform others. A recent Ipsos-Reid poll found 64% of Canadians oppose the slaughter of horses for human consumption. A majority of younger Canadians oppose horse slaughter for human consumption.
- Don’t take Premarin and Prempro. There are effective natural and synthetic alternatives to treat menopausal symptoms.

For more information, please contact us

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