

# Horse slaughter

[Experience](#), [Laughter](#)



The horse is a highly respected animal in United States culture. It has been worshipped and paid tribute to through art, books (Misty of Chincoteague, Black Stallion), movies (Black Beauty, Spirit), and television shows (Mr. Ed). The horse industry is huge in the United States, encompassing everything from rodeos and racing to horses owned for purely pleasure. There have been statues erected of famous racehorses, as well as museums devoted entirely to equines. " Horse culture" is a huge part of American culture.

The slaughter of horses for human consumption does not seem to fit into that culture. However, despite initial reservations, many Americans may agree that the slaughter of horses is better than alternatives. In the United States there are two ways that horses are turned into meat. One is for horses to be euthanized by a veterinarian, or die of natural causes; after which the owner can arrange for the carcass to be rendered into animal feed. The second way horses are turned into food is the typical slaughterhouse procedure.

When a horse is put down the owner gains little or no monetary compensation unless the horse was insured, compared to selling the unwanted animal to slaughter, where a small profit can be gained. When the slaughter method is chosen the animals are herded into the " kill chute", where they are stunned with a blast of carbon dioxide into their brain, and then their throats are slit (Burghart 13). A lot of the time these horses are bought at auction or privately from the owner for as much as \$1000.

All horsemeat that is edible for humans is the product of a horse slaughtered in a slaughterhouse (Burghart 12). For as long as there have been horse

slaughterhouses in the United States, they have been an issue of controversy (Associated Press State and Local Wire, 3). Currently, only two slaughterhouses that produce horsemeat intended for human consumption exist in the United States, both are in Texas. These plants have been shut down and reopened a number of times due to changes in laws throughout the years.

Each company, Beltex and Dallas Crown are foreign-owned and employ few Americans. Animal rights activists, as well as locals in the communities are trying to prevent both factories from operating (Scripps Howard News Service). Recently, the Texas Humane Legislation Network has been leading the attack on the multimillion dollar companies, citing a law from 1949 that "prohibits possession, sale or shipment of horse meat intended for human consumption" (St. Petersburg Times). Both companies have filed lawsuits in retaliation.

They state that the slaughter of horses eases financial strain, feeds other nations, and is accomplished in a humane manner. There are millions of horses in the United States; many of the horses are virtually worthless due to poor training/treatment, bad attitudes, poor confirmation, lameness, sickness, and also simply being old. Slaughter companies provide an affordable way for horse owners to dispose of their unwanted animals. "What do you do with the animal when it is diseased, or old, or lame" said Geert DeWulf, general manager of Dallas Crown... `We provide an outlet" (Scripps Howard News Service).

The benefits are not only felt by horse owners in short supply of money but recently in Europe, the supply of meat from traditional sources, such as cattle, sheep and pigs has dwindled due to epidemics in the herds, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy or "mad cow" disease, as well as hoof and mouth disease. Horsemeat has helped to alleviate some of the countries' strain (Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly). "There is a need for horses at the slaughterhouses," (Scripps Howard News Service). According to British Customs, "The export of horsemeat has doubled in the past five years. People in Britain have been horrified that their Hampshire's New Forest wild ponies have begun to disappear, according to Compassion in World Farming. The rising demand for horsemeat is also being blamed for increased horse theft throughout Italy and the BBC has reported that Germany will slaughter 70,000 horses for their meat this year (American Welfare Institute Quarterly). Both France and Belgium have called for more horsemeat to be produced. The need for red meat can be seen in Belgium's soaring horsemeat prices; \$15 per pound! (Scripps Howard News Service,)

Both the Beltex and the Dallas Crown companies hold that the slaughter of the horses is carried out in the most humane way possible. The president-elect of the American Association of Equine Practitioners, Dr. Tom Lenz "who has witnessed slaughters at Beltex, said the industry kills horses 'humanely. 'The companies use the same method used to kill cows and other livestock that we eat: a quick blow of a stun gun to the head" (St. Petersburg Times). Both of the slaughterhouses are subject to periodic inspections by the European Union Officials, as well as undergo federal inspection. (Forth Worth Star-Telegram) In spite of all of the benefits and assurances, animal rights

activists and the general public do not support the slaughter of horses (Brown). Many feel that there are other alternatives to having to kill the horses for food; that the killing is inhumane and immoral. Activists and equestrians offer many alternatives to slaughtering horses such as placing older or unwanted horses with rescue organizations: " At the end of his life he should be retired, adopted, or humanely euthanized if no better solution can be found.

Anything else makes a mockery of the words which for centuries have been used to describe our game ... Sport of Kings.? -John Hettinger, Trustee, New York Racing Association" (Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly) The problem with this suggestion is the money involved with continuing to care for the animals. Horses cost thousands of dollars to maintain, even when in good health; they must be fed, given vaccinations, have routine visits from a farrier and veterinarian.

Rescue organizations and therapeutic riding centers currently cannot afford to take on more horses, as thousands of horses in the western states were displaced into their hands due to the severe drought in the nation during the past year. Euthanization and the subsequent disposal of the horses' bodies can cost hundreds of dollars. Many owners cannot afford to pay the price of euthanization, and leave their animals in suffering for many years. " Oliver Kemseke, the owner of Dallas Crown said, " Most of the horses here are cripples or have back problems or are crazy in the head....

We don't kill a horse unless there is something wrong" (St. Petersburg Times). Since the horse is an almost mystical part of American culture,

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Americans have a very hard time accepting that horses also are a good protein source (Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly). Activist Cathleen Doyle asks "Who wants to eat someone's pet horse? This is a cultural issue. No one raises horses for food in the United States" (Scripps Howard News Service). However, Stephen Meuse, who teaches the history of food at Boston University, said: "One really doesn't encounter recipes for horse meat in French cook books.

You wouldn't walk into Aladin Ducasse and order horse tartar. Horse meat has always been considered emergency food. Unlike other cultures, Americans are rich enough to create a taboo about an entire category of food, you only get to do that when you reach a certain level of prosperity, when you've gotten to the point where you can be finicky" (Associated Press State and Local Wire). It seems illogical that being a humanitarian nation, the United States would deny countries of a good food source that they are in a position to bestow.

Activists have raised concern over the handling and treatment of the animals to be slaughtered. Because "horses in the US are not raised or consumed for their meat, the horse slaughter industry manages to avoid much of what little oversight exists. Until December 7, 2001, no regulations even existed in the US governing the treatment and care of horses during transport to slaughter" (Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly). "Horses that are killed for human consumption are treated more cruelly than horses euthanized with chemicals. You can't humanely euthanize a horse and eat it" (Associated Press State and Local Wire).

Additionally, individuals have stated that they have witnessed cases of abuse at the slaughterhouses, " When some horses were moved off the trailer, workers poked them with long fiberglass rods through holes on the side of the trailer. The horses, typically very sensitive animals, slid and fell down the ramp only to be whipped by another worker's rod. All of the horses at the facility exhibited fear typical of " flight" behavior in horses, pacing in prance-like movements with their ears pinned back against their heads and eyes wide open.

Once inside the building more callous workers, standing high on the railing that lined the stalls, beat the horses on the nose, forehead, neck, back, or hindquarters to get them to move" (Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly). Managers at the two plants have stated that once new laws were passed governing the treatment of horses to be slaughtered, unnecessary cruelty and brutality was no longer practiced and was frowned upon (Einhorn). However, Steven Cohen, a spokesman for the Food Safety and Inspection Service, said that there is no evidence of mistreatment at the two Texas facilities, (Fort Worth Star-Telegram).

Additionally, the slaughterhouses keeps track of all injuries to horses as they step out of the trailers (Holland). They found that in 1998, 92% of the horses coming off the trailers were in good condition (meaning they had no deep tissue injuries, broken limbs, lacerations, etc. ). Of the 6% that were not in good condition, 73% of the horses had injuries, which happened prior to being loaded onto the trailers for transport. (Grandin, McGee, and Lanier) In

2009, there were approximately 6.9 million horses in the United States. Of these, only 50,000 of them were slaughtered (Heyde).

The revenue from the slaughters was about \$41 million (Associated Press State and Local Wire). The horse slaughter industry produces a large revenue which feeds into our economy. Additional worries are that if horse slaughter is banned in the United States, thousands of America's horses will be smuggled across the country's borders into Mexico and Canada, where the plants are not as humanely run. Dr. Temple Grandin, one of the nation's leading authorities on humane treatment of livestock said "A ban may sound good to some officials, but they have no understanding of the consequences.

Some horses do get hurt on trucks, but the biggest problem is owner neglect long before the horse gets to the slaughterhouse" (Fort Worth Star-Telegram). Until people start taking responsibility for their horses, keeping the slaughterhouses open is necessary. The slaughter of horses alleviates financial burden on horse owners and provides countries without healthy livestock with meat. It prevents further abuse of the animals by giving owners the means to get rid of their unwanted horses.

The slaughter industry is now sharply regulated, and it has been proven that the less stress an animal has to endure, the more tender the meat, which gives factory owners even more incentive to avoid causing animals to panic. Horses are often seen as big pets, best friends, or even children, however in the words of Denny Emerson, former Olympic equestrian and renowned trainer "It is hard to not look at the horse you've raised as one of your



children, but you should never allow yourself to become too attached, the time will come when you will have to cut your losses. Objections to horse slaughter are raised simply because of the American culture, not that the practice is "wrong". Perhaps if there were less horses being bred, the need for slaughter would not exist. As the lawsuit Dallas Crown and Beltex have brought against the 1949 Texas law states, "The presence of millions of horses on this continent has justified the commercial processing of horse meat for human consumption abroad" (Associated Press State and Local Wire). Works Cited: "America's horses are ending up in Europe's restaurants." Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly 50 (2001). 0 Nov 2008. Print. Brown, Angela. "Two slaughterhouses sue Tarrant, Kaufman counties over horse meat ban." Associated Press State and Local Wire 26 Sept 2002. Web. 18 Feb 2012. Burghart, Tara. "Horse Slaughter Plant Last U. S. Slaughterhouse to Close." The Huffington Post 29 Jan 2009: 3. Print. Cowan, Tadlock. Horse Slaughter Prevention Bills and Issues. Congressional Research Service. 2010. Web. 18 Feb 2012. Dorell, Oren. USA Today. U. S. shelters saddled with unwanted horses. 2008. Web. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-03-23-Horses\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-03-23-Horses_N.htm). Einhorn, Catrin. Horses Spared in U. S. Face Death Across The Border. "New York Times 11 Jan 2008: 2. Print. Gay, Lance. "U. S. horses often end up on European dinner tables." Scripps Howard News Service 8 Mar 2001. Web. 7 Feb 2012. Heyde, Christopher. "Necessary evil or blind eye? Putting an end to the cruel practice of horse slaughter." Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly 51 (2001). 10 Nov 2002. Holland, John. "Slaughtering the facts about horse slaughter." Times

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