

# HORSE SLAUGHTER FACT SHEET



## Why Does Horse Slaughter Exist?

Horse slaughter exists for one reason and one reason only — to supply the demand by consumers for horse meat and make a profit from it.

Although horse meat sales declined for a period of years, it became popular again in countries like France, Belgium, Italy and Japan. As demand for horse meat increased, so did demand for horses to slaughter.

Horse meat is viewed as "clean meat" and a tasty alternative to beef and other traditional meats because of BSE and other contamination scares.

Europeans and Asians who consume horse flesh are willing to pay a high price for horse meat. Butchers and purveyors describe American horse meat as the very best on the market.

*"I only buy American meat, which is red and firm. In butchering terms we call it 'well-structured', the best you can get. Out of a thousand animals, only the American ones are really worth buying. But they don't eat horse meat in America. They raise horses for foreigners."*

~ Quote from a Butcher in France

## How many horses are slaughtered from the U.S.?

The three remaining horse slaughter plants operating on U.S. soil were closed in 2007 by State laws.

Initially, fewer horses were killed.

According to the USDA, however, nearly 100,000 equines were exported from the U.S. to Mexico and Canada in 2008 for slaughter. The number increased to over 100,000 in 2009, and nearly 120,000 in 2010.

Those are the ones recorded. Smuggling horses across U.S. borders for slaughter is common, especially to Mexico.

How do the horses get to the slaughterhouses?

Horses are not considered traditional food animals so they are not purposely raised for slaughter. That means they must be bought.

Although a few owners take their horses directly to the slaughterhouse, licensed horse dealers known as "killer buyers" frequent auctions and act as middlemen for the slaughterhouses. Mass quantities of horses are bought by these dealers at unbelievably cheap prices, who transport and resell them to slaughterhouses for profit.

Auction houses and dealers do not turn away starving or severely injured horses. As long as they can keep them alive until they can get them to a slaughterhouse, these horses can be killed for their hides. They are called "skinners." Slaughterhouses typically have a tannery either on site or nearby for this

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reason.

A number of the horses who end up at slaughterhouses are stolen, and disappear without a trace.

Statistics from one of the largest groups assisting owners in the recovery of their stolen horses, Stolen Horse International ([netposse.org](http://netposse.org)) show that approximately 60% of horses stolen are killed at slaughter plants.

## **What types of horses are slaughtered?**

Horses of virtually all ages and breeds are slaughtered, from draft types to miniatures, ponies and pregnant mares, even foals.

Horses mostly commonly slaughtered are ones taken to livestock auctions where they also suffer in horrific conditions.

They are homeless horses, unsuccessful racehorses, horses who are lame or require expensive veterinary care to return them to fitness for work or competition, mares who produce below par breeding industry standards, and foals cast off by the Pregnant Mare Urine (PMU) industry, which produces the estrogen-replacement drug Premarin®.

The majority of U.S. horses going to slaughter are Quarter Horses, as many as 7 out of 10. The remainder are mostly Thoroughbreds. In other countries, the majority of horses going to slaughter are cast offs from the racing and sporting industries, 80% of which are Thoroughbreds.

Most horses purchased for slaughter by "kill buyers" at livestock auctions are in good health when they are bought, usually for a couple hundred dollars, the goal being to get the most meat on the hoof.

## **How are horses taken to these slaughterhouses?**

Horses are transported, often thousands of miles, in double-decker trailers designed for cattle, in all types of weather with no food or water for up to three days.

Often there is not enough clearance for the horses to hold their heads in a fully upright position. They travel this way the entire journey.

No consideration is given to the gender or the condition of the horses as they are crammed into these trucks.

The floors become slippery with urine, caked feces, sweat and blood. Some fall and are trampled, unable to regain their feet.

Loading and unloading is extremely stressful and dangerous for horses as they are moved along the relatively steep ramps. They are shouted at, whipped and beaten with electric cattle prods. Horses often arrive injured. Some are even dead. Horses who are unable to stand are drug off the trucks with ropes and chains.

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Canadian animal transport to slaughter standards are among the worst in the industrialized world. European transport to slaughter standards are also deplorable. What happens when the horses arrive?

The horses who survive the ordeal of transportation are held in pens until it is their turn to be slaughtered. Horses are beaten and electro-shocked from the trucks into overcrowded pens and must endure the smell of the blood and gore, and the sights and sounds of other horses being killed, until it is their turn to die.

## **How are the horses killed?**

### *United States*

Under federal law, horses are required to be rendered unconscious prior to slaughter, usually with a device called a captive bolt gun, which shoots a steel rod into the horse's brain. It was common in U.S. horse slaughter plants for horses to be improperly stunned and conscious as they were hoisted up, their throats slit and bled out.

### *Mexico*

Slaughter horses are stabbed multiple times in the neck with a "puntilla knife" to sever their spinal cords. This procedure does not render the horse unconscious, and it is not a stunning method.

Rather, it paralyzes the horse, leaving him/her twitching on the ground, unable to move or breathe, and then the animal dies from suffocation (because their lungs stop working) or from blood loss and dismemberment.

### *Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Europe and Japan*

Horse slaughterhouses in these countries use either the captive bolt or rifle to render horses unconscious. Investigations of slaughterhouses using a rifle reveal horses shot repeatedly when unskilled workers miss their target, and horses frantically scrambling to their feet in pain and terror, trying to jump the stall to escape. The skulls of many horses discarded by a Canadian slaughterhouse showed no holes from a stun gun or rifle whatsoever.

### *Misconception About "Stunning"*

A major misconception is that animals are stunned prior to slaughter to make the process more humane. The fact is, rendering an animal unconscious prior to slaughter is designed to protect slaughterhouse workers from the flailing limbs of terrified animals and increase their ability to handle them to speed production.

### *Where will all the horses go if slaughter is banned?*

In the U.S., the number of horses slaughtered in 1990 was a staggering 350,000, a number that dropped

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to an all-time low of 42,000 in 2002. Between 1992 and 1993 alone, the number of horses slaughtered dropped 79,000. These decreases did not create a glut of "unwanted horses." Society absorbed these horses, and the market remained stable, just as it will when horse slaughter is eliminated altogether.

The phrase "unwanted horse" is a myth created by horse slaughter supporters in the U.S. and has been picked up by their colleagues in other countries. The number horse slaughter proponents declare as unwanted horses is always the same number of horses killed in slaughterhouses.

In actuality, the number of horses slaughtered is based on the demand for horse meat and the number of horses the plants have the capacity to butcher and process to meet that demand.

There are many alternatives to horse slaughter. Horses can be given another chance at life through retraining and adoption programs or with rescues, retirement homes, and sanctuaries. Sound horses can also enjoy second careers as pleasure horses, Mounted Police horses, and therapy horses.

When a horse becomes old, infirm or mortally ill, the horse should be euthanized by a qualified veterinarian. There are a wide variety of options for post mortem disposal that range from the costly to economical. These include burial (where permitted), cremation, rendering, composting and landfills.

Texas A&M, in response to this question, released a special report on composting as a viable alternative that would be both environmentally and politically beneficial, predicting that this could become a big market when horse slaughter is banned.

### **Won't abuse and neglect increase if there are no horse slaughter plants?**

California banned horse slaughter in 1998. California experienced no increase in abuse cases, instead seeing a decrease three years following the ban.

During the four years that Cavel International was closed, Illinois saw a noticeable decrease in abuse and/or neglect cases. Texas, which had the only two slaughter plants in 2003, had among the nation's highest rates of cruelty and theft.

The conclusion is clear – horse slaughter does not decrease abuse and neglect – it actually encourages it.

### **What can I do to help?**

- Support organizations like ours working to put an end to horse slaughter.
- Be a responsible horse owner.
- Sponsor a horse in a rescue or sanctuary.
- Think before you breed. Adopt from a rescue or sanctuary instead.
- Set up a special bank account to pay for humane euthanasia by a veterinarian and disposal of the remains.
- Say no to Premarin® and Prempro®. Take a safe alternative that is not made with pregnant mare's urine.