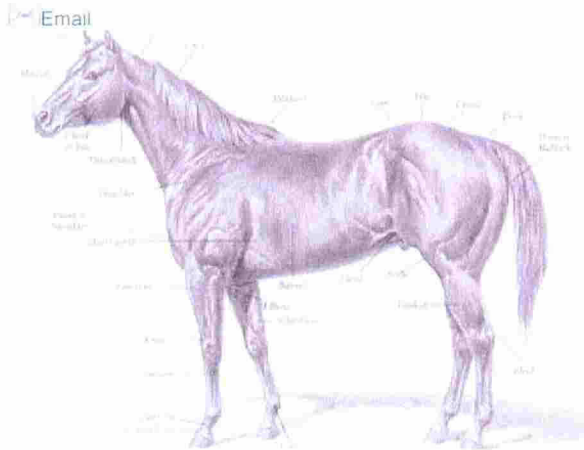


EXHIBIT 15

They Eat Horses, Don't They?

Published on Friday, November 17, 2006, by nicholassday

65 Comments



Ask a restaurant if it serves horsemeat, and you might as well be asking if the chef's sleeping with his sister.

"Oh, no, no, no," says the receptionist at Café des Bruxelles, a Belgian restaurant in New York City. "It's against the law in New York, isn't it?"

It isn't: Eating horsemeat in America is perfectly legal, according to Steven Cohen of the USDA's food safety and inspection service. If it seems wrong, that's not the law—that's, well, you. But bear in mind that the Japanese and many Europeans eat all kinds of horse: horse sashimi in Japan; horse tartare or steak in Belgium; *pastissada*, or horsemeat stew, in Italy's Veneto. Fears of mad cow disease in recent years prompted a spike in horsemeat prices in Germany and Italy.

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Our taboo against horsemeat hasn't stopped the industry from responding to this fondness for it elsewhere. Horses aren't raised in the United States for domestic consumption, but upwards of 80,000 horses are slaughtered here each year for export. A bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives (and pending in the Senate) would end that practice by banning all horse slaughtering, and transport for slaughtering, in America. The law says, in effect: Eating horsemeat is so repulsive that we'll stop other people from doing it.

What's behind such a visceral reaction?

Let's start with where these controversial horse cuts come from: No horse in America is raised for meat. Horses are treated as either pets or work animals. If they're working, it's likely at a racetrack. That's why the horse racing industry is the force behind the anti-slaughter legislation. "It's a big issue," says Ted McClelland, author of a book on the industry, *Horseplayers: Life at the Track* (Chicago Review Press, 2005). "It's considered something that would give the industry a bad name. There is a feeling that the horse worked hard to entertain the public and should get a nice retirement—it shouldn't be a piece of meat." The industry has littered Congress and the media with

polls finding that the vast majority of Americans oppose horse slaughtering. Their contention is that the affection Americans have for horses distinguishes those animals from meat animals like cows or pigs.

But does affection explain everything? After all, a lot of us have affection for bacon *and* Wilbur of *Charlotte's Web*. Eating horse is often likened to eating a companion animal—"dog" is the first word on the lips of most ban supporters. But although a taboo against eating cats and dogs is widely shared, horsemeat is far more common. It's true that the Anglophone countries of Britain, Australia, and the United States share a mysterious aversion to it. But in Canada, a country rarely considered exotic, you can get raw horse in Vancouver (at Yoshi's, a Japanese restaurant), horse steak in Toronto (at the bistro La Palette), and horse anything in Quebec—even a fast-food chain, the Belgian Frite Alors, sells horse tartare. (Horse is free of tuberculosis and tapeworms, and thus safer than beef to eat raw.)

If Americans make a sentimental exception for horses, that isn't more ethical, says Jay Weinstein, the author of *The Ethical Gourmet* (Broadway, 2006). "Horses are beautiful creatures, but there's beauty in so many animals and that's not really a just criteria," he says. "If you're going to eat meat, you can't pick and choose which animals you're going to eat and which ones you're not." For him, livestock for food and livestock repurposed for food are ethically one and the same.

Weinstein would argue that our get-out-of-dinner card for horses isn't moral or consistent. It's simply cultural. But why? "Eating it goes against the cowboy mythology," says Rob Walsh, the restaurant critic for the *Houston Press* and a self-described "culinary thrill seeker." Walsh is working on *The Texas Cowboy Cookbook*, and he suspects that cowboys and the role that horses played in the nation's history might be behind the taboo. Inversely, he also thinks that's why Europeans *do* eat horse: "The cowboy culture came from Spain in the 11th century. In Europe, the vast majority never rode horses." That's why, say, Slovenians are able to swallow foal carpaccio: horses didn't show up in their third-grade history textbooks. Walsh may have an explanation, but he doesn't really understand it himself. "It never ceases to amaze me that Texans love venison sausage but are appalled by horse sausage." (Yes, he's had horse before—in France. His verdict? "It was delicious.")



Roberto Passon, the Italian-born chef of the eponymous New York restaurant, also loves the taste. Passon emphasizes a key point: Since Americans have never had to eat horse, unlike the historically impoverished peasantry of Europe, the meat's never become normalized. "If we train Americans, they would eat it," he says. Asked if he would serve horsemeat to New Yorkers if they'd order it, Passon is enthusiastic: "Oh, definitely." Horse is typically compared to beef—although it is lighter and less fatty—and Passon, who loves its taste, likens its texture to that of skirt steak. "It's very sweet and it's very bloody," he adds. Traveling in Italy recently, he purchased a horse salami, or *salami di cavallo*. (Horsemeat was traditionally used for sausage in Italy's north.) "I compared it to

the pork one, and it was ten times better," he says. "I gave it to my partner, and he's like, this is the best sausage I've ever had. And I said, you're right. That's because it's horse."

No matter how tasty the salami di cavallo was, a lot of Americans would still consider that a nasty practical joke. I asked the butcher at Mitsuwa Market, a massive Japanese supermarket outside Chicago, if he ever had any he could sell. Although the Japanese have no aversion to eating horse, he seemed to suspect a prank. "Uh, what do you want it for?" he said. Well, to cook it, I said.

Pause.

"What sort of cook *are* you?"