



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Washington, D.C.
20250

Ms. Belinda Caron
[REDACTED]

MAY 04 2012

Dear Ms. Caron:

Thank you for your letter of April 12, 2012, to Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack, regarding your concerns about Valley Meat Company's request to operate a horse slaughter facility in Roswell, New Mexico, and the safety of horsemeat as a result of the drugs given to horses. The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has been asked to provide you with a response, and I appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns.

FSIS is the public health regulatory agency in the Department of Agriculture (USDA) responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS enforces the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), the Poultry Products Inspection Act, and the Egg Products Inspection Act, which require Federal inspection and regulation of meat, poultry, and processed egg products prepared for distribution in commerce for use as human food.

As you may know, Congress prohibited the use of funds for inspection of horses for human food with the passage of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 Appropriations Act. However, in November 2011, when Congress passed the FY 2012 Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act (H.R. 2112), there was no language that denied USDA funding for the inspection of horses for human consumption. As mandated by the FMIA, FSIS is, therefore, responsible for the inspection of horses for slaughter.

Before any establishment receives a grant of inspection to slaughter horses, FSIS will verify that the establishment is in compliance with all federal requirements. FSIS will also address the environmental effects of horse slaughter operations. However, FSIS will require additional time to prepare to resume its inspection regimen for horses after such a long gap in performing horse inspections. One reason is the lack of a verification method to determine whether horsemeat is free of animal drug residues that would compromise food safety. FSIS is in the process of validating our new residue testing methods for horsemeat, and we are not able to approve applications from any establishment wishing to slaughter and process horses until we have the science to enable us to apply the USDA mark of inspection appropriately. We expect that work will take a number of months.

Also, FSIS inspection staff assigned to horse slaughter facilities will have to undergo "refresher" training, as they have not performed inspection responsibilities tailored to equine establishments for some time, if at all. Additionally, all potential horse slaughter and processing facilities will have to undergo thorough review under the FMIA and the regulations that implement it. These facilities will need to develop plans to ensure sanitary conditions and to ensure that any food safety hazards are controlled. In addition, they will need to determine how they will comply with the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act and with any applicable State requirements. This work will take time also.

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Protecting public health is FSIS' top priority. To this end, the United States has a residue control program to protect consumers from residues of drugs, chemicals, and pesticides in meat, poultry, and egg products, involving three Federal agencies: the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and FSIS.

FDA is responsible for the approval of animal drugs and feed additives. That Agency establishes limits, known as tolerances, for the amount of an animal drug residue or other chemicals that may be present in a meat or poultry product. You may wish to contact FDA regarding your concerns by visiting their web site at <http://www.fda.gov>, or by writing them. For your convenience, I have provided their address below:

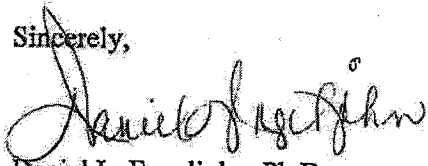
Food and Drug Administration,
Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Consumer Affairs
HFE-88, 5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Maryland 20857

EPA establishes tolerances for the amount of pesticide residues that may remain in a food destined for human consumption, and FSIS enforces the level of drugs, chemicals, or pesticides through its inspections and residue testing program.

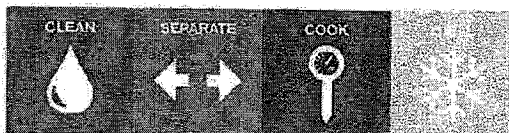
Selling and eating horsemeat is legal in most of the United States, as long as the meat is labeled clearly, and the horses are slaughtered at federally inspected establishments. At this time, FSIS has not issued a grant of federal inspection to any establishment for horse slaughter.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,



Daniel L. Engeljohn, Ph.D.
Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development



Check your Steps at <http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/>