



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Washington, D.C.
20250

MAY 15 2012

Ms. Kelsey Hutcherson
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Hutcherson:

Thank you for your letter of May 2, 2012, to the Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack regarding horse slaughter and your suggestions for regulation of horse slaughter facilities. The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has been asked to provide you with a response, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

As you know, 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, 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.

FSIS also is responsible for enforcing the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA), which requires that all livestock at federally inspected establishments be handled and slaughtered in a humane way. Humane methods of handling and slaughtering livestock prevent needless suffering of animals and result in safer and better working conditions for employees in slaughter establishments. You can learn more about FSIS livestock slaughter requirements, which includes equines, at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Slaughter_Inspection_101/index.asp. With regard to your suggestion of more frequent visits by veterinarians to ensure the HMSA is being followed, you might be interested in knowing that slaughter facilities cannot conduct slaughter operations unless FSIS inspection personnel are present.

Currently there are no facilities approved for horse slaughter in the United States. Following a decision by Congress in November 2011 to lift the ban on horse slaughter, one establishment, located in New Mexico, has applied for a grant of inspection exclusively for equine and FSIS is reviewing the application. However, given that the Agency last conducted a horse inspection 6 years ago, FSIS has determined that despite the congressional decision to lift the ban, the Agency will require a significant amount of time to update its testing and inspection processes and methods before it is fully able to develop a future inspection regimen.

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.

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If you were thinking that horsemeat could be used for animal feed, 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. 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.

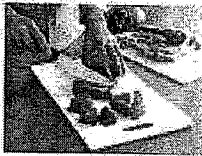
Finally, transportation of livestock is under the jurisdiction of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Information about the APHIS Slaughter Horse Transport Program is available on their Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_dis_spec/horses/horse_transport.shtml

Thank you again for writing and for your interest in this issue.

Sincerely,



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



Protecting public health by preventing food borne illnesses is FSIS' top priority.

Help protect your family. Check Your Steps at
<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/>
and get ready to Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill.

Food safety is important to everyone.