



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAY 22 2012

The Honorable Susana Martinez
Governor
State of New Mexico
State Capitol, Room 400
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Governor Martinez:

Thank you for your letter of April 23, 2012, to the Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding your concerns about horse slaughter in New Mexico. I am pleased to provide you with the latest information on this issue.

As you 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 public law 112-55, there was no language that prohibited the use of USDA funding for the inspection of horses for human consumption. This means that USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is, by law, responsible for the inspection of horses for slaughter, as mandated by Congress in the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA). I assure you that careful thought and consideration will be given when reviewing any application to open a horse slaughter facility.

It has been 6 years since FSIS last conducted horse inspections. FSIS will require a significant amount of time before it is fully able to resume inspection of horses. New laboratory verification methods for animal drug residues require validation, the inspection staff requires training, and the potential horse slaughter and processing facilities have to undergo thorough review under the FMIA and the regulations that implement it. These facilities need to develop plans to ensure sanitary conditions and that food hazards are controlled. They also need to determine how they will comply with the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act and with any applicable State requirements.

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.

Again, thank you for expressing the concerns you and your constituents have about horse slaughter in New Mexico.

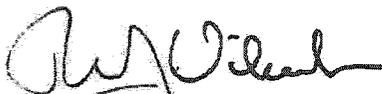
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The Honorable Susana Martinez
Page 2

If you have further questions, or if we can be of additional assistance, please have a member of your staff contact Ms. Jennifer Yezak, Director, Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs, at jennifer.yezak@osec.usda.gov or (202) 720-6643.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary