



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety and
Inspection Service

Washington, D. C.
20250

MAY 04 2012

Madeline A. McGrath
c/o Ms. Jennifer Horne



Dear Miss McGrath:

Thank you for your letter of April 19, 2012, to the Secretary of Agriculture regarding your concerns about horse slaughter. 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.

FSIS is also 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. Transportation of livestock is under the jurisdiction of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. 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.

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 (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.

However, FSIS will require additional time to prepare to resume its inspection regimen for horses after such a long gap in inspection. One reason is the lack of a verification method to determine whether horsemeat is free of animal drug residues that would compromise food safety.

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FSIS is in the process of validating our 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.

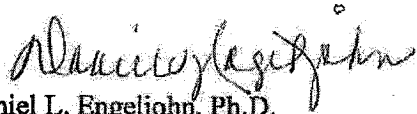
Also, FSIS inspection staff assigned to horse slaughter facilities will also have to undergo "refresher" training, as they have not performed inspection responsibilities tailored to equine establishments for some time, if at all. Additionally, all potential horse slaughter and processing facilities will 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. They will also 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.

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.

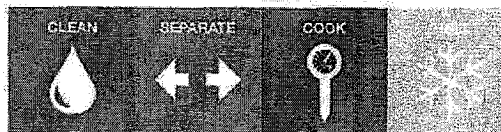
For more information about FSIS and enforcement of the HMSA, as well as food safety information, please visit our Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Thank you again for writing and for your concern for the humane treatment of horses.

Sincerely,



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



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