

December 8, 2012

Racetrack Drugs Put Europe Off U.S. Horse Meat

By **JOE DRAPE**

PARIS — For decades, American horses, many of them retired or damaged racehorses, have been shipped to Canada and Mexico, where it is legal to slaughter horses, and then processed and sold for consumption in Europe and beyond.

Lately, however, European food safety officials have notified Mexican and Canadian slaughterhouses of a growing concern: The meat of American racehorses may be too toxic to eat safely because the horses have been injected repeatedly with drugs.

Despite the fact that racehorses make up only a fraction of the trade in horse meat, the European officials have indicated that they may nonetheless require lifetime medication records for slaughter-bound horses from Canada and Mexico, and perhaps require them to be held on feedlots or some other holding area for six months before they are slaughtered.

In October, Stephan Giguere, the general manager of a major slaughterhouse in Quebec, said he turned away truckloads of horses coming from the United States because his clients were worried about potential drug issues. Mr. Giguere said he told his buyers to stay away from horses coming from American racetracks.

“We don’t want them,” he said. “It’s too risky.”

The action is just the latest indication of the troubled state of American racing and its problems with the doping of horses. Some prominent trainers have been disciplined for using legal and illegal drugs, and horses loaded with painkillers

Mexican horses, are insufficient to guarantee that standards equivalent to those provided for by E.U. legislation are applied," the report said.

The authorities in the United States and Canada acknowledge that oversight of the slaughter business is lax. On July 9, the United States Food and Drug Administration sent a warning letter to an Ohio feedlot operator who sells horses for slaughter. The operator, Ronald Andio, was reprimanded for selling a drug-tainted thoroughbred horse to a Canadian slaughterhouse.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency had tested the carcass of the horse the previous August and found the anti-inflammatory drug phenylbutazone in the muscle and kidney tissues. It also discovered clenbuterol, a widely abused medication for breathing problems that can build muscle by mimicking anabolic steroids.

Because horses are not a traditional food source in the United States, the Food and Drug Administration does not require human food safety information as it considers what drugs can be used legally on horses. Patricia El-Hinnawy, a spokeswoman for the agency, said agency-approved drugs intended for use in horses carried the warning "Do not use in horses intended for human consumption."

She also said the case against Mr. Andio remained open.

"On the warning letter, the case remains open and no further information can be provided at this time," Ms. El-Hinnawy said.

A New York Times examination of American horse racing showed an industry still mired in a culture of drugs and inadequate regulation and a fatal breakdown rate that remains far worse than in most of the world. The examination found that 24 horses died each week at America's racetracks and that in one recent three-year period, more than 3,800 horses had positive drug tests, mostly for illegally high levels of prescription drugs.

Many American racetracks bar owners and trainers from running horses at their facilities if they are caught sending horses for slaughter, but the cases are difficult to prove. Last May, however, a Quebec slaughterhouse operated by Viande Richelieu returned the former racehorses Canuki and Cactus Cafe to