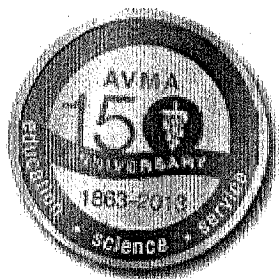


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Unwanted Horses and Horse Slaughter (FAQ)

Updated February 1, 2012

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The unwanted horse

Q: What is an "unwanted horse?"

A: An unwanted horse is a horse that has, for one or more reasons, become unwanted by its owner. It may be a healthy horse that an owner can no longer afford to keep or feed. It may be a horse that is dangerous to handle and has injured (or is likely to injure) people. It may be a horse with an injury, lameness, or illness for which the owner is unwilling or unable to provide care. Some horses are no longer able to perform as their owner desires, whether that be for racing, pleasure riding, or some other purpose. A 2009 survey conducted by the Unwanted Horse Coalition revealed three primary reasons why a horse becomes unwanted: (1) changes in an owner's situation (e.g., employment status, ability to afford a horse, loss of owner interest in or use for the horse), (2) the horse is too old or injured, or (3) the horse is unmanageable. Another survey performed by researchers at the University of California-Davis determined that many horses were relinquished due to owner-related issues, most notably financial hardship (52.4%). In addition, the condition of the horse played a role with 53.2% of horses appearing unhealthy upon arrival at the accepting organization. That survey also indicated most horses are relinquished voluntarily, with seizures only accounting for 15.1%.

Regardless of the reason, these horses no longer have permanent homes.

Q: How many unwanted horses are there?

A: In 2005, the American Horse Council (AHC) estimated there were 9.2 million horses in the United States. An accurate census of the U.S. horse population has not been performed, and the AHC has requested that USDA perform a national equine census at regular intervals. We do not have reliable statistics on the total number of horses that become unwanted each year. We do know that 90,000 to 140,000 horses have been sent to slaughter annually (the GAO estimated the 2011 number at 138,000), and that the total number of unwanted horses is greater than this. In 2007, the Unwanted Horse Coalition estimated there were 170,000 unwanted horses in the U.S. (including animals in the BLM adoption pipeline and unadopted feral animals housed in BLM facilities).

Q: Are horses – unwanted or otherwise – considered companion animals, or livestock?

A: According to the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act horses are considered livestock. Otherwise, horses fall into a gray area because they have been slaughtered for human and animal consumption in the past but are also viewed as companion animals. Labels on FDA-approved horse drugs state, when applicable, that the product is not for use in horses intended for food production. The FDA does not require such statements on the labels of drugs approved for use in traditionally companion animals such as dogs and cats.

Options for unwanted horses

Q: What happens to unwanted horses? Aren't there enough homes for all of them?

A: Several things can happen to unwanted horses. Sometimes find new homes

with someone willing to provide them with care and attention and/or redirect them to second equine careers. Other horses may be placed in equine rescue, rehabilitation or retirement facilities. Some are euthanized by a veterinarian at the owner's request. What happens to the others? Humane slaughter is one option. Others may end up abandoned, neglected, or abused.

Although there are numerous equine rescue facilities throughout the United States, these facilities do not have enough capacity or resources to accommodate all the unwanted horses. The Unwanted Horse Coalition's 2009 survey revealed that 39% of rescues are at maximum capacity and another 30% are at near capacity. On average, rescues are turning away 38% of horses brought to them. These numbers have been substantiated by researchers at the University of California-Davis who found that 83.9% of facilities surveyed received additional requests to accept horses between 2006-2009.

In addition, horse rescue facilities are not regulated. Although most are reputable and caring places, there is no way to guarantee that they will (or can) provide adequate care for the horses they take in.

Most rescue facilities rely on donations for their operation. The average lifespan of a horse is 30 years. In 2005, the American Association of Equine Practitioners estimated the cost of caring for a horse to be approximately \$1,825 per year—and that doesn't include veterinary or farrier care. Factoring in the rising costs of feed and hay, that number is likely higher now. According to a 2009 survey of horse rescue facilities by the Unwanted Horse Coalition, on average \$2,300 must be budgeted yearly to care for one horse. It is not clear whether this figure includes veterinary and farrier costs.

Many horses will require treatment for chronic conditions and costs can quickly add up. In addition, horses currently being received by rescue facilities are thinner and sicklier than in previous years, requiring additional care and expense. Drought conditions leading to higher prices for hay and grain have compounded the problem, making covering expenses even more challenging for individual owners and rescue facilities alike.

Rescue, rehoming, and euthanasia are preferable options for unwanted horses; unfortunately, there are more unwanted horses in the United States than can be accommodated by these options. According to the UC Davis survey, when it came to transitioning horses back to private ownership only 26.2% of relinquished horses were able to be re-homed. Another option that owners have chosen to deal with their unwanted horses is humane slaughter. With the closing of the equine slaughter plants in the United States, horse owners choosing slaughter as an option must arrange to have their horses shipped to either Canada or Mexico. Transport over these longer distances raises animal welfare concerns.

Q: Why aren't unwanted horses handled the same way as unwanted dogs and cats?

A: There are fewer options available for horses because of their body size and nutritional requirements. Dogs and cats can be kept in larger numbers in facilities because they require less space per animal. In addition, food for dogs and cats can be purchased at grocers, "big box" stores or specialty stores; feed and hay for horses

must generally be purchased from specialty stores and there must be adequate space to store the feed and hay.

It's also much more difficult to dispose of a euthanized horse's body than that of a dog or cat, simply because of size. Dogs can weigh upwards of 100 pounds, but that pales in comparison to the 1,000-1,200 pound weight of an average horse. Many states have strict guidelines for carcass disposal based on water-tables (with regards to burial) and method of euthanasia. The larger the animal, the more difficult meeting those guidelines can become.

Q: You're worried about reported increases in abuse or neglect. Aren't there laws to prevent that?

A: Every state has laws that define animal abuse and neglect; penalties often vary from state to state. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to enforce these laws unless an animal is already suffering or near death. In addition, many states lack the manpower and financial resources necessary to monitor and investigate neglectful and abusive situations. Very few, if any, states have set aside parts of their budget to provide for the care of seized horses.

Q: What are the acceptable methods of euthanasia for horses?

A: There are three methods for the euthanasia of horses: chemical euthanasia, with pentobarbital or a pentobarbital combination (euthanasia solution); gunshot; and penetrating captive bolt.

Chemical euthanasia is preferred by many veterinarians and horse owners. This procedure requires injection of euthanasia solution into the horse's vein, and the use of an intravenous catheter is recommended to make sure all of the solution is properly injected. Euthanasia solution is a controlled drug (C-II or C-III), subject to regulation by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and must be stored in locked cabinets when not in use. This is the most expensive form of equine euthanasia. Carcasses of horses euthanized chemically can potentially contaminate the environment, and pose a substantial risk of poisoning for prey species (especially birds) unless they are disposed of or protected from scavenging in a proper and immediate manner. Nevertheless, chemical euthanasia is the recommended method of euthanasia for horses, unwanted or otherwise, as long as environmental concerns are appropriately addressed.

Gunshot and the penetrating captive bolt are physical methods of euthanasia that cause death by destruction of brain tissue. When applied correctly, unconsciousness is instantaneous and they induce death more rapidly than chemical euthanasia. Euthanasia by gunshot may pose an inherent risk for other animals and humans, and should only be performed by someone skilled in the method and in a safe environment. The penetrating captive bolt is safer than gunshot euthanasia because it does not release a projectile (e.g., bullet). Please note that there are two types of captive bolt—penetrating and nonpenetrating. The penetrating captive bolt induces death by firing a rod into the brain. The nonpenetrating captive bolt causes a severe concussion that stuns the animal but may not kill it. The nonpenetrating captive bolt is not considered a humane method of euthanasia for horses.

Gunshot and penetrating captive bolt euthanasia are less expensive than chemical euthanasia and do not present risks of environmental contamination or animal poisoning. These techniques are considered aesthetically displeasing by many horse owners (in part because common signs of unconsciousness include immediate collapse and a several-second period of tetanic spasm, followed by hind limb movements of increasing frequency), but they are effective and humane when properly performed. Many large animal emergency rescue groups carry penetrating captive bolts for use in emergency situations. For example, when a fatally injured horse is trapped in a trailer, it may not be possible to access the horse's veins to chemically euthanize it, and discharging a firearm in a closed trailer is extremely dangerous. The penetrating captive bolt is the preferred method of euthanasia in this situation because it induces rapid death without jeopardizing the lives of other animals or people in the trailer.

To read the AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, for more information

Q: Why can't all the unwanted horses be euthanized if the rescues can't take them?

A: Euthanizing such a large number of animals presents some minor and major problems.

Chemical euthanasia is the method preferred by horse owners and veterinarians, but it can also be cost prohibitive for owners and requires the use of a controlled substance that is subject to strict regulation by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). These factors, coupled with the environmental risk posed by the carcass, make this option less viable for euthanasia of larger groups of horses.

Even if gunshot or penetrating captive bolt is used, disposal of larger number of horse carcasses still could present challenges and environmental risk. Burial is often preferred by owners, but is actually one of the least environmentally friendly disposal options and poses the risk of surface and ground water contamination as the body decomposes. Landfill disposal is an option in some areas, but property owners may limit the number of horse carcasses that can be placed in the landfill and chemically euthanized carcasses may not be accepted. Rendering may be a viable option for larger quantities of horse carcasses. Other disposal options, such as composting, incineration and biodigesters, may not be available, may be cost-prohibitive, or may only be able to accommodate small numbers of horse carcasses.

Cost is another consideration. According to the Unwanted Horse Coalition's 2009 survey, the average cost of euthanasia and carcass disposal (as reported by horse owners) is \$385 per horse. Who absorbs the costs associated with euthanasia and disposal of unwanted horses?

Cost estimates (source: USDA, 2008)

Burial	\$250-500
Landfill	\$80-500
Rendering	\$75-250
Incineration/cremation	\$600-2,000

Composting	Variable
Biodigester	No cost provided

Horse slaughter and transport to slaughter

Horse meat

Q: How many horses from the United States are slaughtered each year, and how does this compare to the number that die or are euthanized?

A: Approximately 1 to 2% of the U.S. equine population is slaughtered each year. That number has not changed since horse slaughter in this country ceased with the closure of the last slaughter house in 2007. By comparison, approximately 10 to 12% of the U.S. equine population dies or is euthanized each year.

Q: How is horse meat used?

A: Most horse meat produced by slaughterhouses in Canada and Mexico is exported to Europe and Asia for human consumption. An often overlooked demand for horse meat comes from zoos and wild animal sanctuaries. Large carnivores, such as lions and tigers, require a lot of high-quality protein in their diets. Although their nutritional requirements can be met with other types of meat, horse meat has more protein, less fat, less cholesterol, less sodium, and more iron than the same amount of high-quality beef. A number of zoos have stopped feeding horse meat to their large carnivores due to consumer pressure, but there are still zoos in the United States that purchase horse meat from foreign sources to provide nutrition for their animals.

Welfare issues associated with horse slaughter

Q: Is the method used to kill the horses during slaughter humane?

A: Yes, when performed correctly. Euthanasia techniques result in a rapid loss of consciousness, cardiac or respiratory arrest (the heart and lungs stop), and loss of brain function. The penetrating captive bolt is a physical method of euthanasia. Its action is similar to that of a gun, but it does not release a bullet; instead, a steel pin is driven through the skull and into the brain, causing instantaneous loss of consciousness and brain death. It can be safer to use a penetrating captive bolt than a gun, because there is no bullet and therefore no risk of ricochet or injury to people or other animals from the bullet passing through the animal's body. In large animal emergency situations, such as fatally injured horses trapped in overturned trailers, the penetrating captive bolt is used for euthanasia; many large animal emergency rescue units carry penetrating captive bolts for use in these situations.

(Note that we're not talking about the non-penetrating captive bolt, which is used to stun animals and render them unconscious. If a non-penetrating captive bolt is used, another method must be used to kill the unconscious horse.)

When horses were slaughtered in the United States, they were rendered insensible using a penetrating captive bolt. The AVMA Panel on Euthanasia performed an extensive review of the scientific literature and determined that, when properly used by skilled personnel with well-maintained equipment, the penetrating captive bolt is a humane method of euthanasia. Neither the USDA nor the AVMA has any influence or control over methods that may be used at slaughterhouses outside the United States. When slaughter is conducted in the United States for human consumption it is regulated under the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act.

Q: I've heard that Temple Grandin, a world-renowned expert on slaughter and animal welfare, has said that it would be impossible to make horse slaughter humane. Is that true?

A: We've heard conflicting statements that have been attributed to Dr. Grandin, so we went "straight to the horse's mouth," so to speak, and asked her. Her reply was:

"It is possible to make horse slaughter humane. The problems I have seen on the various undercover videos are correctable. The two most important design features are a non-slip floor in the stun box and solid sides to prevent the horse from looking out onto the slaughter floor."

Handling and stunning works best if two people are employed. One person drives the horse into the stun box and shuts the door and the other shoots it. This enables the horse to be shot before it has a chance to get upset.

I am a big proponent of video auditing by a third party auditor over the internet. This prevents the problem of people acting good when they are being watched, and then engaging in rough handling when nobody is watching. Horse slaughter can be done humanely, but it will require the commitment of management to good animal welfare."

Horse theft and slaughter

Q: How many horses are actually stolen and sold to slaughter houses?

A: Nobody really knows how many horses have been stolen and sold for slaughter. Although some individuals and organizations claim this number is high, no data exists to either confirm or disprove such statements. We do know that horses are more commonly stolen for their value as performance or breeding animals than they are for their value as meat.

There has been a lot of speculation as to how a prohibition on horse slaughter will affect the number of horses that are stolen. The number of reported horse thefts in California decreased after passage of its slaughter ban in 1998, but nationwide numbers from reputable sources are not available. In addition, how many stolen horses were sold to slaughterhouses before and after horse slaughter was prohibited in California is not known and, therefore, these numbers cannot be compared to evaluate the success of the ban.

The real impact of prohibiting slaughter on the number of horses stolen nationwide remains to be seen. There are many websites in the United States that have been established to assist in reporting and locating stolen horses, but the odds of recovering a stolen horse shipped to another country are much lower.

Transport to slaughter

Q: What are the current federal regulations regarding the transport of horses to slaughter?

A: Current regulations (9 CFR 88) include requirements for (1) segregation of stallions and aggressive equines from others in the shipment; (2) sufficient interior height to allow equines to stand with normal posture and head height, and sufficient floor space per equine to prevent crowding; (3) doors and ramps of sufficient size to allow safe loading and unloading; (4) provision of food, water, and an opportunity for the equines to rest for at least 6 hours immediately prior to transport; (5) placement of a USDA backtag on each equine in the shipment; (6) completion of shipping certificates regarding fitness to travel; (7) safe driving habits to avoid causing injury to the animals; (8) observation of the animals at intervals of not less than once every 6 hours; (9) immediate euthanasia of any animal that becomes nonambulatory (unable to walk) en route; (10) offloading and a minimum of 6 hours' rest for animals that have been on the transport vehicle for 28 consecutive hours; (11) proper handling of the equines to minimize discomfort and stress, including the banning of electric prods; (12) access to food and water immediately upon unloading; and (13) USDA inspection of all animals in the shipment. As of December 7, 2006, double-decked trailers were banned for transportation of equines directly to slaughterhouses. As of October 7, 2011 the rules were broadened, redefining "equine for slaughter" to include any horse "being transferred to a slaughter facility, including an assembly point, feedlot, or stockyard." The rule changes move-up the point at which the regulations apply in the process of moving horses from farms and sales to a slaughter facility. The changes provide horses delivered to intermediate points en route to slaughter with the same protections regarding food, water, hour limits, and the prohibition on double-decker trucks, as those horses moved directly to plants.

Prior to the recent change, the rule only applied to horses moved to a slaughter plant, not to horses that were moved at some point to an assembly point, feedlot or stockyard. As a result, horses sold as slaughter horses could be transported to an assembly point, for example, in a double-deck trailer and without any of the protections afforded under the previous regulations.

Under current regulations, horses are not eligible for transport to slaughter unless they are able to bear weight on all four limbs; able to walk unassisted; able to see out of at least one eye; are older than 6 months; and, if pregnant, are not likely to give birth during the trip.

Q: I've heard that current rules regulating the transport of horses to slaughter aren't being enforced by the USDA. Is that true?

A: Many of the infractions that have been identified and cited by those criticizing the USDA's enforcement of transport to slaughter regulations are technical violations (e.g., paperwork violations) that have no impact on the welfare of horses transported to slaughter. Citing numbers of such violations can also be misleading because often multiple violations have been committed by the same owner/shipper.

That said, there is little doubt that the USDA is underfunded and may not have the

resources to fully enforce the regulations. In addition, remember that the USDA has no regulatory jurisdiction over the transport of horses designated for other uses (regardless of whether or not those designations are legitimate or fraudulent).

Q: As written, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act will ban the interstate transportation of horses for slaughter. Won't that prevent them from being transported to other countries for slaughter?

A: No, it will not. It will be difficult to enforce the law, and there is nothing to stop slaughter house buyers and dealers from describing horses as "riding," "breeding," or "pleasure" horses when they are transported. This may already be happening, based on the marked increase in the number of horses transported to Mexico for declared reasons other than slaughter. Once these horses cross the border, there will be no way to determine whether they find homes or are sold for slaughter.

Consequences of a federal ban on horse slaughter

Q: If a federal ban on horse slaughter is passed, what will happen to the horses?

A: The fact that we do not know, and concerns about what could happen, is why the AVMA cannot in good conscience support a federal ban on horse slaughter without ensuring protection for the horses affected (i.e., funding and infrastructure to address unwanted horses must be included in any legislation prohibiting slaughter—to date this has not happened). Removing slaughter as a humane option will leave many horses with nowhere to go and no one to care for them. There will likely be an acute rise in abuse, neglect, and abandonments with corresponding negative impacts on horse welfare. As discussed previously, horse rescues and sanctuaries are already at or near capacity and local officials commonly lack authority and resources to enforce penalties against neglectful or cruel horse owners. And, as mentioned previously, the ban will likely not be fully effective since some horses will still be transported across borders under false pretenses (e.g., breeding or pleasure) and then be sold into slaughter. A significant concern with transporting horses across the borders for reasons other than slaughter is long-distance travel that cannot be monitored by USDA for humaneness under their current regulatory authority. Catching violators and enforcing the law would be nearly impossible. Transport of horses to slaughter within the United States was regulated while horse slaughter was permitted in this country, but regulatory authority ends when horses cross the border into another country. They might be loaded in numbers that exceed trailer capacity, transported longer distances, deprived of food or water, and killed using inhumane methods.

Q: Is it true that veterinarians will benefit financially from the reopening of horse slaughter houses, if they reopen?

A: A few veterinarians working for the Food Safety and Inspection Service are charged with enforcing the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act and the Federal Meat Inspection Act. These veterinarians may be assigned to slaughterhouses processing horses to protect animal welfare and food safety. These veterinarians would draw a salary comparable to other FSIS positions at other types of slaughterhouses.

Q: The AVMA said that more horses are being neglected or abused since the slaughterhouses closed down. What evidence do you have to support that?

A: We've already provided evidence that more and more horses are being transported to other countries and slaughtered. Making such transport illegal will not eliminate it altogether. This means longer rides for these horses and an increased potential for inhumane treatment after they've crossed our borders.

There have been an increasing number of media reports of horse neglect and abandonment. In addition, there are many articles about equine rescue facilities, already understaffed and underfunded, turning away horses because they are already at full capacity; this is supported by the results of the **Unwanted Horse Coalition's 2009 survey**, in which 63% of equine rescue facilities reported they are at or near full capacity and, on average, turn away 38% of the horses brought to them. The **2011 GAO report** further supported these concerns. Additionally a University of California-Davis survey found 53.2% of the horses relinquished to rescues and sanctuaries appeared unhealthy upon arrival to the accepting organizations/facilities.

There are many factors at play in these situations. Droughts have caused hay prices to soar, and more and more people are having trouble finding affordable hay for their horses. Hay prices have at least doubled in many areas of the country. As more unwanted horses remain in the horse population, hay shortages and high costs will increase the cost of care and further deplete resources. It will cost more to care for these horses, and many rescue facilities are already financially strapped. This adds to the AVMA's concern that these animals may be more likely to be abandoned or neglected.

Q: California banned horse slaughter in 1998, and I was told that animal abuse and neglect didn't go up. Doesn't that mean a federal law would be effective?

A: In 1998, California banned the possession, transfer, receipt, or holding of any horse, pony, burro, or mule with the intent to have it slaughtered for human consumption. Although the number of reported horse thefts declined following passage of the law, the percentage of animals recovered after theft also declined. Reports of animal abuse or neglect did not increase. However, there has been no investigation of the number of horses that may have been shipped out of the state under false pretense and sent to slaughter. The number of horses slaughtered in the United States declined from 1997 to 1998 (before passage of the California law), and declined further from 1998 to 1999 and from 1999 to 2000, but then increased. It does not appear that passage of the California law had a substantial, long-term impact on the number of horses slaughtered nationwide; it is likely that horses were illegally transported out of California, or that horses from other areas filled any void created by the law.

This is very similar to the situation recently reported in Mexico. California banned the practice, so the horses were likely shipped out of state before they were sold for slaughter. Now that there are no horse slaughterhouses operating in the United States, horses are being shipped to other countries to get around the process and

the laws.

While it's difficult to demonstrate a direct link between the cessation of slaughter and incidents of abuse and neglect, information compiled by the GAO in the production of its report indicated a rise in horse abuse, neglect and abandonments since the cessation of slaughter in the United States. Unfortunately, this information is confounding by the poor economy and high hay prices. The real, nationwide effect of the elimination of horse slaughter on the frequency of horse abuse or neglect remains to be seen.

The GAO Report

Q: What did the GAO find?

A: The findings of the report include:

- The economic downturn reduced prices for all horses by 4 to 5%;
- Closing domestic horse slaughtering facilities significantly and negatively affected lower-to-medium priced horses by 8 to 21%; higher-priced horses appear not to have lost value;
- State, local government, and animal welfare organizations report a rise in investigations for horse neglect and more abandoned horses since 2007;
- With cessation of domestic slaughter, USDA lacks staff and resources at the borders and foreign slaughtering facilities that it once had in domestic facilities to help identify problems with shipping paperwork or the condition of horses before they are slaughtered;
- An unintended consequence of the cessation of domestic slaughter is that those horses are traveling farther to meet the same end in foreign slaughtering facilities where U.S. humane slaughtering protections do not apply.

For more information, read the full GAO report, "Action Needed to Address Unintended Consequences from Cessation of Domestic Slaughter."

Q: What did the GAO report recommend?

A: Summarily, the GAO report recommended that Congress either facilitate the resumption of domestic horse slaughter *or* ban it altogether (including transport to other countries for slaughter).

The report also made recommendations to the USDA to (1) strengthen the regulations and protecting horses during transport to slaughter; (2) increase the enforcement of slaughter transport regulations; (3) revisit the formal agreement with Canadian authorities; and (4) seek a formal agreement with Mexican authorities.

For more information, read the full GAO report, "Action Needed to Address Unintended Consequences from Cessation of Domestic Slaughter."

Q: I heard that the GAO report was "debunked" by an economist. Is that true?

A: Absolutely not. The GAO consulted with economists, including agricultural

economists, to review their analytical model; as stated in the report, these experts "generally found the model specifications and results credible. Several offered specific technical comments related to the presentation of the model results, which we incorporated, as appropriate." For more information on the objectives, scope and methodology of the GAO report, read Appendix I beginning on page 47.

What some groups refer to as "debunking" the report is actually a position statement from the Equine Welfare Alliance and the Animal Law Coalition, two groups that oppose equine slaughter. Their position statement questions the data and statements of the GAO and alleges a conspiracy, including a "Congressional cover-up." Ironically, their position statement also indicates in its conclusions that "the GAO has a reputation for objective and thorough research and fair reporting." In our opinion, the position statement lacks scientific support and the Equine Welfare Alliance and Animal Law Coalition have focused on non-relevant data and speculation to support their accusations and conclusions. It may be that the two groups view the GAO report as a "propaganda tool" because the GAO's report does not support their viewpoint.

To see the GAO's full description of the methods used to analyze the data, see Appendix I on page 47 of the GAO report.

Q: What is the AVMA's response to the GAO report?

A: The AVMA was pleased with Congress' request for the report because it demonstrated that Congress is aware of the growing problem. The AVMA believes the GAO, a nonpartisan body, took a thorough and balanced look at the impact of the cessation of domestic horse slaughter on the welfare of horses, and made important recommendations that should be heeded by Congress and the governmental agencies involved in this issue. The unwanted horse issue is much larger and more complex than what is currently being argued in Congress. There is no ideal solution, but the AVMA believes funding and other infrastructure **MUST** be put in place to ensure appropriate long-term care for unwanted horses **BEFORE** any options for managing them (e.g., slaughter) are eliminated.

The AVMA's position

Q: What is the AVMA's position on unwanted horses?

A: We are extremely concerned about the welfare of unwanted horses and the reports we're seeing and hearing of increasing numbers of horses being abandoned, abused, and neglected. There are more horses than there are homes for them, and we need solutions. To develop short- and long-term solutions that are viable and sustainable, cooperation among a variety of groups will be necessary. We're confident that if breeders, owners, horse rescuers, and other stakeholders can collaborate and cooperate, this welfare problem can be effectively addressed.

Q: What is the AVMA's position on horse slaughter?

A: Until suitable short- and long-term solutions to address the welfare issues associated with unwanted horses are in place, we believe that *none* of the options for dealing with unwanted horses – including slaughter – should be eliminated. We would prefer to see horse slaughter cease in the U.S. when and if there are NO

MORE unwanted horses to justify its continued existence, but that's not realistic at this time.

Note that the AVMA does not equate horse slaughter with euthanasia. The Panel on Euthanasia that drafts the AVMA's Guidelines on Euthanasia considers euthanasia, depopulation and slaughter to be different activities. All must be conducted as humanely as possible, but the circumstances surrounding them and the desired outcomes are sufficiently different that the Panel believes they need to be considered separately. Accordingly, during the next couple of years, the AVMA will be producing separate guidance documents on depopulation and humane slaughter to supplement its guidelines on euthanasia.

Q: Why do you say eliminating slaughter is not the answer?

A: Until we have better, more viable short- and long-term solutions in place to address unwanted horses, we don't believe that any of the existing options should be eliminated. Simply put, there will be no supply of horses for slaughter if there are no unwanted horses – or, at least, not enough unwanted horses to justify the existence of slaughter auctions, suppliers and facilities. The key to solving the problem doesn't lie solely in eliminating, or maintaining, slaughter – it lies in responsible horse ownership and breeding. If everyone who purchased or bred a horse accepted responsibility for caring for that horse throughout its entire life, or finding another person to do so if the original owner is unwilling or unable, there would be no more unwanted horses. Breeders, horse organizations, and horse owners should all be aware of the possible fates of unwanted horses, and should make a conscious effort to educate themselves and the public about responsible horse ownership and take proactive steps to ensure that they aren't contributing to the problem. This has been our opinion all along, and the reason we joined the Unwanted Horse Coalition. We support their motto, "Own Responsibly."

When horse slaughter isn't an option in the United States, horses are transported out of the country to be slaughtered. This is a problem because the USDA has no jurisdiction in other countries, and has no power to make sure that horses are transported and slaughtered in a humane manner. As a result, horses transported to slaughter are protected by laws when they are within the borders of the United States, but may be transported and slaughtered inhumanely once they leave our borders.

Responsible horse breeding and responsible horse ownership go hand-in-hand; the long-term solution to the unwanted horse problem involves breeders breeding fewer horses (increased focus on quality, not quantity) and owners accepting responsibility for the care of these horses throughout their lives. While we are actively supporting initiatives focused on these areas, it will be years before their impact is felt. We have a large population of unwanted horses for which immediate options are needed; and humane slaughter is one of those options.

Q: Animal rights groups are calling you a pro-slaughter organization. Is this true?

A: No. The AVMA is not pro-slaughter. Ideally, there would be caring homes for all horses, and there would be no market for the equine slaughter industry. The AVMA opposes the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (AHSPA) because it is a bad

bill that ignores the real issue—what do we do with all of these unwanted horses? Until viable and sustainable short- and long-term solutions are developed and implemented, we believe that none of the existing options should be eliminated.

Q: Does the AVMA consider slaughter a form of euthanasia?

A: The Panel on Euthanasia and its Working Groups, which include more than 70 technical and species experts, consider euthanasia, depopulation, and slaughter to be distinct activities. Euthanasia is a method of killing that minimizes pain, distress and anxiety experienced by the animal prior to loss of consciousness, and causes rapid loss of consciousness followed by cardiac or respiratory arrest and death. Depopulation is the killing of animals in large numbers, such as in the face of disease outbreaks, bioterrorism, and natural disasters. Slaughter is the killing of animals for the purposes of harvesting commodities such as meat or hides. The latter two activities involve humane killing, which is performed in a manner that attempts to minimize animal distress, but may not meet the requirements of euthanasia due to situational constraints (e.g., risks to human public health and safety, inability to use certain substances due to residues in the product to be harvested).

Q: Do you differentiate between slaughter and slaughter for human consumption? Do you feel differently about them?

A: No. We don't promote horse slaughter for either reason and we do not view it as the preferred method for dealing with unwanted horses, regardless of how the meat is used. That said, if horses are to be humanely slaughtered, we would prefer that the meat is not wasted, that it is used in a responsible manner, and that measures are taken to ensure the meat is safe for consumption.

Q: If you don't endorse or promote slaughter, why are you opposed to Congressional legislation banning slaughter?

A: We oppose the legislation because it ignores the real issue, which is the unwanted horse, and fails to address the need to develop and implement solutions to that problem. We have repeatedly urged Congress to focus on finding solutions to the problem of unwanted horses, rather than focusing on the highly debated and emotionally charged issue of horse slaughter. The AVMA has outlined a number of concerns with the legislation: options for disposition and funding for the care of unwanted horses; funding; ensuring appropriate care of horses in rescue and retirement facilities; and proper disposal of large numbers of equine carcasses. Should these issues be appropriately addressed, the AVMA will reevaluate its position on the legislation.

We're also concerned that a Congressional ban on horse slaughter will not eliminate slaughter but will instead drive the industry underground. Although we hope that authorities would be able to police this activity, we believe it will be very difficult to effectively enforce a ban. Currently, the USDA has jurisdiction over the welfare of slaughter-bound horses during transportation, but no jurisdiction over horses transported for other reasons. If slaughter is banned, unethical transporters and suppliers may simply declare the horses as breeding or riding stock; yet the horses still end up at slaughterhouses.

Q: Does the AVMA currently accept or has it ever accepted any

money from the owners of the horse slaughter plants?

A: No. The AVMA and the AVMA Political Action Committee (AVMA-PAC) have not received, and will not accept, any money from the horse slaughter industry, including those who own the plants. The AVMA's position on this legislation is based solely on concerns about the welfare of unwanted horses.

The AVMA's primary source of operating funds is the dues of its veterinarian members, and the AVMA-PAC can only accept donations from AVMA members. This means the Association is not dependent on either industry or public fundraising dollars and is able to take positions based on their merit, rather than because of how such positions may be viewed by donors.

Q: What is the AVMA's affiliation with the Horse Welfare Coalition, the slaughter plants, and the Web site, www.commonhorsesense.com?

A: The Horse Welfare Coalition (HWC) was formed in 2004 by the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA), the AVMA, and the Animal Welfare Council. Although the slaughter plants offered funding to the HWC, that funding was declined. The HWC stopped meeting in mid- to late-2006.

The Web site, www.commonhorsesense.com, was initiated and maintained by the horse slaughter plants. The HWC granted the website permission to post issue briefs, but did not fund, support, or otherwise contribute to the website. The site was maintained by a lobbying group hired by the slaughter industry, and the AVMA did not contribute to or provide funding for its maintenance. We're not sure when the site was deactivated, but it is not active at this time.

Q: What is the AVMA's affiliation with the United Horsemen?

A: The AVMA is not affiliated with United Horsemen.

Q: What is the AVMA's affiliation with the Unwanted Horse Coalition?

A: The AVMA is a member of the Unwanted Horse Coalition.

Q: I've heard the Unwanted Horse Coalition (UHC) is pro-slaughter. If so, why are you a member of the UHC if you say you're not pro-slaughter?

A: This is a common myth perpetuated by certain groups. It's often easier to assume that anyone who doesn't 100% agree with you is against you; therefore, if a group isn't anti-slaughter, they're pro-slaughter. This is how the AVMA, AAEP and UHC have been labeled, and it is absolutely incorrect. Because it is a broad-based coalition, the Unwanted Horse Coalition has, in fact, declined to take a position on the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act.

The AVMA, AAEP and its other members support the UHC because the Coalition is dedicated to reducing the number of unwanted horses and improving their welfare through education and the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety,

and responsible care and disposition of these horses. If you go to their website, you will see no pro-slaughter messaging because that's not what the group is about.

Q: What will the AVMA do if the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act is passed and horse slaughter is banned?

A: We will continue to support and advocate for development and implementation of viable short- and long-term solutions to the issue of unwanted horses.

Q: What will the AVMA do if the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act is not passed and domestic horse slaughter resumes?

A: We will continue to support and advocate for development and implementation of viable short- and long-term solutions to the issue of unwanted horses.

We will also encourage the strengthening and enforcement of laws and regulations that protect the welfare of horses and ensure the safety of any meat destined for consumption.

What veterinarians and the AVMA are doing to help

Q: What are veterinarians doing to help the unwanted horses?

A: A large number of veterinarians, many of whom are members of the AVMA, already donate or provide discounts for time, services, and medications to reputable horse rescue facilities. Others rescue and provide homes and care for horses at their farms and veterinary practices. However, just as any person's ability to contribute their time and money are limited by what they can afford, veterinarians must also be able to earn money to keep their practices open and support their families. New graduate veterinarians carry an average of more than \$142,613 in student loans, and it takes them a lifetime to pay them off; they simply cannot afford to donate all of the services, time, and medications required to support the entire unwanted horse population. They're doing their part, but they can't do it alone.

Q: What is the AVMA doing to help unwanted horses?

A: The AVMA's Governmental Relations Division (GRD) has been actively educating Members of Congress on the plight of the unwanted horse, and that the issue is much more complex than just discussing a ban on horse slaughter. Proposed solutions advocated for include setting standards for equine rescue and retirement facilities; researching environmentally sound methods for disposal of euthanized animals; promoting owner and breeder responsibility; and providing funds for the care and/or euthanasia of unwanted horses.

When members of the GRD office are on Capitol Hill discussing the issue with members of Congress and their staff, they are NOT telling them to reinstitute horse slaughter. Instead, they are urging them to support the development of viable solutions to address the welfare of the unwanted horse. When asked what method we recommend for disposing of unwanted horses that cannot be placed in rescues, we recommend euthanasia.

As a member of the Unwanted Horse Coalition (UHC), the AVMA is looking at

possible legislative solutions that will address funding for the care and disposition of unwanted horses. The AVMA has repeatedly requested amendments to the bill to address the funding, care, and disposal of unwanted horses, but these requests have gone unanswered.

Q: Does the AVMA itself sponsor or run any programs to directly help unwanted horses?

A: The AVMA hasn't developed its own program to address the unwanted horse. We believe a centralized, coordinated effort is more likely to be successful than a fragmented group of overlapping programs, so we contribute to the Unwanted Horse Coalition's work. By pooling AVMA's efforts with those of other groups, the UHC can provide this coordinated approach and more effectively deliver assistance where it's really needed. Among the UHC programs is Operation Gelding, which provides financial support for low-cost/no-cost gelding clinics around the country. See the UHC's "In the News" page for more information on its programs.

Q: What other veterinary groups are helping unwanted horses?

A: The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), in cooperation with Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health, established the Unwanted Horse Veterinary Relief Campaign to provide healthcare to assist equine rescue and retirement facilities.

There's a growing number of local and regional groups, such as Sound Equine Options, that are run by or have participating veterinarians.

How to help

Q: I want to donate money to help these horses. How can I help?

A: Many rescue facilities are at risk of closing their doors due to inadequate funding, and their closures may add to the unwanted horse problem. Results of the 2009 survey by the Unwanted Horse Coalition showed that rescue/adoption/retraining facilities are "highly dependent on public and private donations" and that one-fourth of the financial support for the facility comes from the owner's personal income. Other funding sources include public/private donations or sponsors (58%); income generated by selling horses, boarding, riding fees, lessons, events and/or member dues (12%); and grants or board financing (5%).

Keep in mind that there is no oversight or regulation of rescue facilities, and although most are run by caring, dedicated people who provide good care for the horses, some are not as responsible. We suggest that you carefully evaluate any charity before you donate to see how they use the donated money and ensure that your donations are used in a manner consistent with your expectations. For an overview and some guidelines on selecting a horse rescue charity, read "The Current Status of Rescue" (PDF). The Unwanted Horse Coalition also has a directory of facilities that accept horses.

Q: Where can I find some advice on establishing a horse rescue?

A: It would certainly help you to contact and speak with people who currently run equine rescue facilities, and do your research on the tax laws, facility or property

laws, and other local, state, or federal regulations that may apply.

Use the AAEP's **Care Guidelines for Equine Rescue and Retirement Facilities**. And don't forget to list your rescue in the Unwanted Horse Coalition's **directory of facilities that accept horses** and apply for help from the **Unwanted Horse Veterinary Relief Campaign** (run by AAEP and Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health).

Q: How else can I help?

A: We encourage you to contact your **Congressional Representatives and Senators** and ask them to reconsider the inclusion of language in the bill that will address the funding, care, and disposal of unwanted horses. Please do this regardless of how you feel about the horse slaughter issue.

If you are a facility that can accept and/or place horses, please have your facility listed in the Unwanted Horse Coalition's **directory of facilities that accept horses**. Once you complete a brief questionnaire about your facility, it can be included. The service is free of charge.

Want more information?

Q: Where can I go for more information?

A: The AVMA is a member of the **Unwanted Horse Coalition (UHC)**. The UHC is dedicated to reducing the number of unwanted horses and improving their welfare through education and the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety, and responsible care and disposition of these horses.

Additional resources:

The Unwanted Horse Issue: What Now? Forum Revised Proceedings (2008, pdf) (USDA)

Alberta [Canada] Horse Welfare Report (2008), Alberta Equine Welfare Group

Horse Welfare: Action Needed to Address Unintended Consequences from Cessation of Domestic Slaughter (2011, pdf) Governmental Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees

The Unintended Consequences of a Ban on the Humane Slaughter (Processing) of Horses in the United States (2006, pdf), Animal Welfare Council

Unwanted Horse Coalition website

Rescue/Retirement Facilities

Unwanted Horses Survey 2009

Survey of Trucking Practices and Injury to Slaughter Horses (Temple Grandin et al)

Market News and Transportation Data (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service)

Source: Staff research; AVMA Animal Welfare, Governmental Relations and Communications Divisions

Contact: Dr. Kimberly May, AVMA Communications Division, 847-285-6667

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