

Fact Sheet

Support H.R. 503/S. 727 *The Prevention of Equine Cruelty Act of 2009*

Representatives John Conyers (D-MI) and Dan Burton (R-IN) and Senators Mary Landrieu (D-LA) and John Ensign (R-NV) have introduced H.R. 503/S. 727 to ban the slaughter and export of horses for slaughter for human consumption.

Transport to slaughter – and the slaughter itself - is horse abuse. Even though horse slaughter has stopped in the U.S., our horses are still being subjected to intense suffering and abuse through transport and slaughter over the border. Undercover footage show live horses being dragged, whipped, and crammed into trucks in 110 degrees on their way to a horrific form of slaughter in Mexico and Canada. Horses are stabbed multiple times in the neck with a “puntilla knife” to sever their spinal cords. This is not a stunning method - it paralyzes, leaving the horse twitching on the ground, unable to move or breathe. They are hoisted, bled out, and dismembered, while still conscious. In the U.S., horses also suffered gravely from long distance transport and were not properly stunned, dying horrible deaths.

Horses are our trusted companions and have never been raised for human consumption in America. A symbol of grace and beauty, horses have contributed greatly to our society throughout history. They have carried us into battle, plowed our fields, and served as endless sources of inspiration and beauty. Americans hold horses in high esteem and believe they deserve respect and dignity. National polls show that 70% of Americans strongly favor a ban on horse slaughter. However, American horses are being killed for foreign gourmands in France, Belgium, and Japan. Show horses, pony ride ponies, racehorses, wild horses, carriage horses, and family horses are victims of the horse slaughter industry.

Slaughter is not a “necessary evil.” Slaughterhouse operators want everyone to believe that all the horses they slaughter are old or injured, without any other options. In truth, USDA statistics show that 92.3% of all horses sent to slaughter arrive in “good” condition – meaning they are sound and in good health. Horse rescue operators report being routinely outbid by killer buyers at auctions, demonstrating how allowing horse slaughter actually prevents horse rescue. Over the last two decades, horse slaughter has declined dramatically (from 413,786 in 1990 to 66,400 in 2002), demonstrating that the horse industry has always absorbed the horses that would have gone to slaughter in past years. When California banned horse slaughter in 1998, the horse theft rate dropped 34% and there was no rise in horse abuse or neglect cases.

Owner responsibility is the answer. It is a matter of personal responsibility when someone takes on an animal as a companion or work animal. If a person can no longer care for a horse, they have a responsibility to seek out other options for placing the horse or have it humanely euthanized, rather than simply try to profit by selling it to slaughter. Putting the animal on a truck for 1,500 miles of long-distance transport to a slaughter plant is not a responsible option.

Background.

- September 2008: House Judiciary Committee passes ban on horse slaughter by voice vote.
- September 2007: U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit upheld the State of Illinois' decision to ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption, shutting down the last of the plants located on US soil.
- April 2007: Senate Commerce Committee passed S. 311, a ban on horse slaughter, by a 15-7 vote.
- March 2007: Federal 5th Circuit Court determined that a 1949 Texas state law outlawed horse slaughter for human consumption. The Supreme Court denied a cert petition submitted by the horse slaughter plants.
- September 2006: A permanent ban on horse slaughter passed the House by a 263-146 vote.
- September 2005: Senate passed a funding limitation amendment to ban horse slaughter by a 69-28 margin, following a House vote of 269-158 in June 2005. Funding limitations remain in place in the federal budget today.



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MYTHS AND FACTS REGARDING HORSE SLAUGHTER

Myth: Weren't the foreign-owned plants in the U.S. a better alternative than horse slaughter plants over the border?

Fact: The plants in the U.S. have all been prohibited from slaughtering horses for good reason. Undercover footage from inside these horse slaughter facilities in the U.S. demonstrated how horrific these plants were - many horses were conscious when they were shackled and hoisted by a rear leg to have their throats cut. There was a history of abuse and cruelty at the U.S. plants, including employees whipping horses in the face and horses giving birth on the killing floors. USDA recently released photos of horses with broken bones protruding from their bodies, eyeballs hanging by a thread of skin, and open wounds all taken at former U.S. horse slaughterhouses. Slaughter is not euthanasia – it is a brutal and terrifying end for horses. We should not allow our horses to be subjected to this tremendous cruelty inside – or outside – of our borders.

Myth: This legislation will lead to an increase in unwanted horses and resulting horse abuse and neglect.

Fact: A ban on horse slaughter will not lead to an increase in unwanted horses or abuse and neglect. USDA statistics show that more than 92% of horses slaughtered are in good condition and able to live productive lives. In California, where horse slaughter was banned in 1998, there has been no corresponding rise in cruelty and neglect cases, while horse theft dropped by 34% after the ban. In Illinois, when the plant was shut down for two years, horse neglect and abuse decreased in the state. Allowing one's horse to starve is not an option in any state – state anti-cruelty laws prohibit such neglect. Most horses that go to slaughter are not unwanted, but rather wind up in the hands of killer buyers because they are in good health and will bring a better price per pound for their meat. Providing for a horse, including humane euthanasia when necessary, is just part of responsible ownership and this bill will not limit owners' rights to sell, donate, or euthanize their horses.

Myth: There is no need for this legislation because slaughter is a humane form of euthanasia.

Fact: Horse slaughter is a far cry from humane euthanasia. "Euthanasia" means a gentle, painless death provided in order to prevent suffering. Horse slaughter is a death fraught with terror, pain, and suffering. Horses are shipped for more than 24 hours at a time in crowded double-deck cattle trucks without food, water, or rest. Pregnant mares, foals, injured horses, and even blind horses must endure the journey. Once they arrive, their suffering intensifies – our undercover footage of horse slaughter plants in the U.S. demonstrated that conscious horses were shackled and hoisted by the rear leg and have their throats slit. Even though all three plants in the U.S. have been prohibited from slaughtering horses, the horse slaughter industry continues to haul horses by the truckload in greater numbers than ever, where they are stabbed to death in Mexican slaughter plants. When no other option exists, unwanted horses should be humanely euthanized by a licensed veterinarian rather than placed on a truck, cruelly transported and then butchered. The vast majority of horse owners (99%) already use humane euthanasia for their old or ill horses.

Myth: Banning horse slaughter undermines private property rights.

Fact: Allowing horse slaughter facilitates violation of property rights by encouraging the conversion of private property when horses stolen and sold for a profit. Many domestic horses are stolen out of pastures and barns every year for the horsemeat trade. Ohio newspapers reported on the theft of two prized former racehorses whose owner had been planning to retire them to an equine sanctuary. Instead, two horse thieves sold the animals for \$250 each to an auctioneer, who then sold them to a killer buyer employed by one of the three foreign-owned horse slaughterhouses. Sky Dutcher came to Washington, D.C. to tell the story of how her horse, Cimmarron, was stolen from his corral on her 12th birthday and sent to slaughter within two days. When California banned horse slaughter in 1998, the horse theft rate dropped 34%. Further, private property rights do not grant owners the unfettered right to abuse their animals. Every state has anti-cruelty laws that mandate protections for animals. Michael Vick would love to have claimed that his private property rights protected him from an indictment for dogfighting, but that is clearly not a justification for harming animals. Owners will still have ample legal options of reselling, donating, or euthanizing their horse (costs approx \$225 – the amount of one month's keep for a horse).

Myth: Ending horse slaughter will cause environmental harm because there will be so many carcasses in need of disposal.

Fact: USDA documents that more than 92% of horses that go to slaughter are in good condition – they will not need to be euthanized. Some 900,000 horses die annually and are safely disposed of by means other than slaughter, and the infrastructure can easily absorb an increase in numbers. Rendering, incineration and burial are all options, depending on local laws. Conversely, the operation of the horse slaughterhouses has a very real negative environmental impact, with all three in violation of local environmental laws related to the disposal of blood and other waste materials.

Myth: If this legislation is enacted, the federal government will face the financial burden of care for horses no longer going to slaughter.

Fact: This assertion rests on the false premise that all horses currently going to slaughter would become the financial responsibility of the federal government. Horse owners, not the government, will remain responsible for the care of their horses. Owners who no longer wish to keep their horses and who cannot sell or place their horses in a new home will have the option of humane euthanasia. The average cost for veterinarian-administered euthanasia and carcass disposal – approximately \$225, the cost of one month's care – is simply a part of responsible horse ownership.