

Table of Contents

Introduction-James J. Hickey Jr., American Horse Council.	2
The Historical Perspectives of the Unwanted Horse –Nat T. Messer IV, DVM.....	3
Ethical Perspectives on the Unwanted Horse Issue & the Us Ban on Equine	
Slaughter-Camie R. Heleski, Ph. D.	8
Carcass Disposal Options-David L. Meeker, Ph. D., MBA.....	15
Unwanted Horses: Fact or Fiction	
Holly Hazard, HSUS	20
Tom Lenz, DVM, MS, DCAT.....	26
Professor Karin Bump	27
Commercial Transportation of Horses to Slaughter in the United States;	
Knowns and Unknowns	
Tim Cordes, DVM.....	38
The Alberta Horse Report-Jennifer Woods.....	41
Little Brook Farms Provides Humane Alternatives for the Unwanted Horse-	
Lynn Cross	43
The Unwanted Horse Issue: Now What? Potential Solutions and Options-	
Tom Persechino, AQHA.....	46
Groups Involved in Horse Related Work.....	55

Welcome

James J. Hickey, Jr.
American Horse Council

On behalf of the American Horse Council, other members of the organizing committee, and today's speakers, I would like to welcome you to today's forum on the unwanted horse issue. I would also like to thank USDA for hosting this meeting and for collaborating with the AHC in preparing and organizing the day.

The forum is entitled "The Unwanted Horse Issue: What Now?" The purpose of today's educational forum is to try to identify the current circumstances surrounding "unwanted horses," whether there are such horses, and if there are, how many there are, the causes of their being unwanted, and the possible solutions and available options to help them. We hope it will be an opportunity to collectively identify the current situation regarding the well-being of these horses and to discuss solutions and alternatives to deal with them before they slip into the "unwanted" category.

The focus of today's meeting is the "unwanted horse." The intention is to bring people together to seek a greater understanding of the current issues surrounding unwanted horses and horse owners.

In developing the agenda for today, the organizers focused on getting a balanced set of speakers with varied views and expertise. We have speakers from Congress and USDA, from equine industry groups, welfare groups, equine rescue centers, and more. There will be discussions on historical and ethical perspectives of the situation, what is fact and what is fiction, the Federal role in creating viable solutions to the issue, transportation issues, and potential solutions and options for unwanted horses.

The USDA, AHC and our speakers hope that today will be an opportunity for all in attendance to come together and discuss our concern for the unwanted horse, to share information, and discuss solutions to benefit the well-being of these horses. We hope it will provide the will for all of us to leave here and continue our efforts, collectively and individually, to erase the term "unwanted horse" from the equine vocabulary.

Thank you for your interest and thank you for coming.

The Historical Perspectives of the Unwanted Horse

Nat T. Messer IV, DVM

University of Missouri

Unwanted Horse Coalition & AVMA

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM:

The current plight of the unwanted horse in the United States has been directly impacted by various recent state legislative actions. The legislation was most likely intended to be in the horse's best interests, but it has brought about unintended consequences that now appear to be having a negative impact on the welfare of these horses. This would not be the first time that mandated legislation has had good intentions, but ultimately resulted in some unexpected consequences that adversely affected the welfare of horses. One only has to look at such pieces of legislation as the Wild Horse and Burro Protection Act of 1971, the Horse Protection Act of 1970 and the Amended Horse Protection Act of 1976, the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, and the Commercial Transport to Slaughter Act to see that even the best laid plans don't always accomplish their true goals. So, as we address the plight of unwanted horses, it is particularly important to reflect on the past so as to avoid similar ill-fated legislative efforts when it comes to what the future brings for the unwanted horse.

"Unwanted horses" represent a subset of horses within the domestic equine population determined by someone to be no longer needed or useful, or their owners are no longer interested in or capable of providing care for them either physically or financially. Until 2007, most unwanted horses were likely sent to slaughter with fewer numbers being rescued/rehabilitated, euthanized and disposed of through rendering, burial, discarded at landfills, or composted, with still fewer simply abandoned and left to die of natural causes. Since the closure of all of the US slaughter plants, a significant and increasing number of unwanted horses are being exported to Canada and Mexico for slaughter.

Within the horse industry there are always going to be unwanted horses. If you think about it, whenever a horse is sold, the seller didn't want the horse any longer. If the sale is successful then that horse is no longer unwanted, but if there is no sale the horse remains unwanted. Unwanted horses range from being essentially normal, healthy horses of varying ages and breeds to horses with some type of disability or infirmity; horses that are unattractive; horses that fail to meet their owner's expectations for their intended use, eg: athletic ability; horses with non-life-threatening diseases; horses that have behavioral problems; or horses that are truly mean or dangerous. In many cases, these horses have had multiple owners, have been shipped from one sale barn, stable, or farm to another, and have ultimately been rejected as eligible for any sort of responsible, long-term care.

For the past 15 years and up until 2007, approximately 1-2% (75-150,000 horses) of the domestic equine population, on average, in the United States was sent to slaughter each year, with another 10-20,000 horses each year being exported to Canada for slaughter during this same period of time, and, an unknown number of horses being sent to Mexico for that purpose as well (\cong 6,500 in 2005, 12,000 in 2006, 45,000 in 2007).¹ In 1997, slightly more than 1% of the domestic equine population was sent to slaughter (approx. 72,000 horses). In comparison, according to the 1998 NAHMS Report², 1.3% of horses age 6 months to 20 years (approx 80,500 horses) on all premises surveyed either died or were euthanized in 1997, while 11.1% of horses greater than 20 years of age (approx. 55,000 horses) on all premises surveyed either died or were euthanized in 1997. Assuming these numbers are at least somewhat representative of what occurs annually, then nearly 100 horses either die or are euthanized for every 50 horses that go to slaughter and at least 200,000 equine carcasses must be disposed of annually, one-third of which were being processed for human consumption until 2007, with the remainder being cremated, buried, "digested", disposed of in landfills, or rendered.

When the number of unwanted horses are combined with the 20,000 + feral horses deemed to be un-adoptable (or unwanted) that are being maintained by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on privately owned sanctuaries, plus 6 - 8,000 horses being held in short-term holding facilities operated by the BLM awaiting adoption (temporarily unwanted), and an unknown but significant number of horses housed at rescue and retirement facilities waiting for a new owner, one can readily see that the number of truly and/or potentially unwanted horses constitutes a significant number of horses to be dealt with each year and in the future.

To their credit, various equine welfare organizations, breed-specific organizations, and numerous benevolent equine welfare advocates and horse owners have made a conscientious and concerted effort to either provide care for unwanted horses, provide funding for the care of unwanted horses, or to find suitable accommodations for them in both the private and public sector. These efforts, along with widespread efforts to inform the public about the plight of the unwanted horse, fewer slaughter plants operating in the United States, changes to the IRS tax code, and a relatively high demand for horses by prospective buyers presumably accounts for the decrease in the number of horses being sent to slaughter over the past 5-10 years. The carrying capacity for these retirement farms, rescue farms, and sanctuaries, as they are called, is unknown at this point, but despite their noble efforts to provide care for many unwanted horses, the number of unwanted horses far exceeds the resources currently available to accommodate them all. Even well-meaning volunteers can become overburdened with unwanted horses, at times to the detriment of the horses under their care. There simply are not enough volunteers, funding, or placement opportunities for all of the unwanted horses. And, since the closure of all US slaughter plants in 2007, the burden has increased substantially.

Why are there so many apparently unwanted horses? Is there, as some would suggest, a glut of horses in the United States today? Was there, then, an even larger glut of horses when 200-300,000 horses were being sent to slaughter in the early '90's? The horse industry depends, to a large extent, on the buying and selling of horses. It also depends on being profitable. Without demand from buyers and supply from sellers, the horse industry would not exist. For the past 5-10 years, the demand for horses on the part of those buying horses has been very good. Over the years, however, this demand has certainly run in cycles that frequently follow other economic trends. In general, when the demand for horses is low, then the number of unwanted horse's increases, regardless of what their bloodlines may be. Recent changes in various breed organization's rules, such as permitting the use of embryo transfer and frozen semen, have favored the production of horses, allowing breeders to produce more than one offspring per year from mares, and allowing breeders to more efficiently select for horses with desirable bloodlines or performance records. New technology will further facilitate this practice in the future. Unfortunately, even with the help of technological advances, not every mating will produce a horse that meets the expectations of a buyer. For those in the business of breeding and raising horses, an unsold horse becomes a liability rather than an asset.

Currently, to the author's knowledge, there is a lack of information about the demographics of unwanted horses other than the generalizations made previously, ie, not marketable, disabled or infirm, unattractive, lacking athletic ability, dangerous or mean. According to United States Department of Agriculture statistics, the horses going to slaughter basically follow the demographics of the horse population in general, ie, nearly equal numbers of mares and geldings, primarily Quarter Horses followed by the other breeds ranked in order of their relative numbers in the general horse population. A more detailed study investigating the demographics of horses deemed to be unwanted would allow the horse industry to focus more appropriately on the problem. For example, former racehorses are frequently singled out as examples of unwanted horses when their racing careers end and they are not candidates for breeding or other athletic endeavors. There are undocumented estimates suggesting that less than 10% of the horses that go to slaughter are Thoroughbreds, but just how many of the 100,000 + horses that went to slaughter last year in the US and Canada were former racehorses? What is the average age and sex of those unwanted horses? What are the types of things that cause them to be unwanted? Are they purebred or grade horses? Answers to questions such as these and many more need to be addressed to be able to understand the problem and potentially reduce the number of unwanted horses.

Whenever there are large numbers of unwanted horses as there are today, there is always concern for the welfare of these horses. However, even though there appears to be an increase in the reports of equine abuse and neglect³, there is no reliable way to document the actual number of these instances of abuse or neglect, other than what can be read in the news. Neglect of horses takes many forms and is due to a variety of factors. Could this upsurge in neglect be due to solely to an increasing

number of uninformed horse owners unfamiliar with the proper care of horses or could it be due purely to economic constraints created by the downturn in the economy since 9/11? Or, could it be due to the availability of affordable ways to responsibly dispose of unwanted horses brought about by regulations prohibiting burial of animal carcasses in some locales, costs associated with veterinary euthanasia and disposal by cremation, “digestion” or rendering, and closure of existing slaughter plants processing horses for human consumption? All of these factors must be considered when faced with such a large number of unwanted horses and what should be done with them, always ensuring they are treated humanely and with dignity until the end of their lives. It is important for all of us to remember that, in all likelihood, it only matters to us, and not the horse, what happens to them after they are gone.

There are on-going efforts on the part of certain equine advocacy groups to get Congress to pass legislation to ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption in the United States as well as the export of horses for this purpose. Bills have been introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate which would ban slaughter as well as the exportation of horses for slaughter. The House of Representatives passed their version of the bill unanimously in 2006. However, through all of this legislative activity, there has been no legislation proposed that would provide for the care and welfare of the 70 – 80,000 horses that have been sent to slaughter each year in the past several years should slaughter be outlawed. If slaughter or transport/export for slaughter is outlawed, what will happen to those horses? Will the owners who didn’t want those horses suddenly have a change of heart? Or will they simply neglect them or abuse them? In an effort to appease the advocacy groups, haven’t the legislators in support of this legislation completely ignored the welfare of the unwanted horse by not assuring there is an infrastructure in place to care for these horses? Many seem to believe that if slaughter is banned, the problem will go away.

Fortunately, the American Association of Equine Practitioners initiated discussions about the plight of the unwanted horse in 2004 by sponsoring an Unwanted Horse Summit in Washington, DC. In attendance were members of AAEP, representatives from the horse industry and breed organizations, representatives of the animal welfare advocacy groups and representatives from the USDA and Congress. From that Summit was formed the Unwanted Horse Coalition. The Unwanted Horse Coalition was “adopted” by the American Horse Council and this coalition of horse industry organizations, veterinarians, and animal welfare organizations will oversee initiatives to educate horse owners to “own responsibly” and help identify solutions to the problem of unwanted horses. It will be through these sorts of discussions that solutions will be found to address the needs of the unwanted horse, not by passing, under pressure from advocacy groups, some ill-conceived legislation before there is a plan to care for so many unwanted horses. Let’s not repeat some of the mistakes from the past when it comes to mandated legislation.

REFERENCES

¹National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Agricultural Statistics Board, U.S.

Department of Agriculture, 1998 Report. www.usda.gov

² National Animal Health Monitoring System Equine '98 Study. Part 1: Baseline Reference of 1998 Equine Health and Management, United States Department of Agriculture/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. September 1999.

N280.898

www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ceah/cnahs/nahms/equine/Equine98/eq98pt1.pdf

³ American Veterinary Medical Association

http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/unwanted_horses_news_articles.asp

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE UNWANTED HORSE ISSUE & THE US BAN ON EQUINE SLAUGHTER

Camie R. Heleski, Ph.D.

Department of Animal Science

Coordinator, MSU Horse Management Program

Michigan State University

East Lansing, MI 48824

Research interests: Horse Behavior & Welfare; Horse-Human Interaction

Though our conversations today are slated to discuss the issue of unwanted horses versus the US ban on equine slaughter, my feeling is that one cannot be separated from the other. We will hear varying viewpoints on these topics today, and multiple interpretations of the facts and perceptions related to these items. I encourage you to listen closely to all of them before coming to your own conclusion. It is a highly emotional issue fraught with intense feelings.

BACKGROUND

I want to start by letting you know the issue of equine slaughter has been a controversial and emotional topic for me for well over 30 years. I was raised on a small, family-run horse farm. My father was a high school biology teacher; my mother was a school librarian. The goal of our farm was to generate enough income to pay for the costs of our family's personal horses and their correlated showing costs. To that end, we trained horses of all breeds, raised some Arabians and half-Arabians, gave riding lessons, and boarded a few horses. Typically we had about 20 horses at the farm during the summer, and about 10 horses during the remainder of the year.

When I was about 9, my father made the difficult decision that we needed to sell two of our older, chronically lame horses to the local horse trader (though we had no illusions about where those horses were actually going). It was a hard decision for my dad, and an even harder one for him to explain to his daughters, but he was trying to run a business; he needed to show evidence to the IRS (if need be) that he was making economically defensible decisions. Selling two horses for ~ \$250 each made far more economic sense than spending ~ \$100 each (at that time) to have them euthanized and buried. However, even though my dad convinced me it was the sensible thing to do, I never quite got over the emotional discomfort of that day.

Fast forward 30 years to the summer of 2006. My niece and her family had purchased a small, stock-type mare for a reasonable price that seemed gentle and reasonably well broke. However, after she bucked off my brother-in-law and frightened my niece, I volunteered to take the mare to my house for awhile to work with her. She was aloof from the start, but easy enough to deal with. I began riding her daily and quickly established that she hadn't been trained with much finesse, but did appear rideable. So much so, that I had my 14 year old daughter ride her one night while I was away (and my husband was home). In the arena, with no apparent provocation, she bolted and caused my daughter to leap off just before hitting the arena fence. My daughter got back on and rode her for a bit, then put her away. The next day, I rode her (and knew about the previous day's events). I double checked saddle fit, bridle fit, palpated for back discomfort, mouth discomfort...anything I could think of. Now I have ridden several hundred horses over the years and exercised race horses for six summers, and never, ever have I had a horse bolt with me at the speed that horse did on that day. I had been walking her in a small circle since she seemed nervous (again for seemingly no reason) and she just flat-out bolted. I've stopped a number of runaways over the years, but this one proved unstoppable. I bailed just before she hit the fence and ended up with a concussion-induced black out, an MRI and a \$2200 hospital bill (luckily covered by insurance).

After I got my sensibilities back, I informed my brother- and sister-in-law that I could not in good conscience let them take that horse back home with them because I had no doubt that she would badly hurt someone at some time. Euthanasia was not an option they wanted to consider, so I agreed to take the mare to an auction...realizing where she was likely to end up. I felt that I had a greater ethical responsibility to the safety of my niece than I did to protect the life of that horse. In my mind, that horse broke her social contract (which we'll discuss later). When I took her to the auction, which I admit is one of the hardest things I've ever done, I wrote several paragraphs about the mare and had the auctioneer read them aloud. I did not want anyone mistakenly buying the horse as a youth riding mount. (Oh, I should mention, several months later, my sister-in-law found out that this horse had a history of doing similar things to her past riders).

Despite the fact that this horse hurt me badly (I had a shoulder injury that took over 6 months to heal and had short term memory loss for about two weeks), I do not directly blame the horse. In all probability, someone, somewhere had done a lousy job of training this horse and somehow imparted terror into her in response to certain actions (that I never did put my finger on...and please remember that studying horse behavior is my specialty area). Nonetheless, she had become a danger; in all probability, she was going to continue to hurt unsuspecting riders, and there just aren't enough homes out there for "pasture companions". When there are so many well-behaved, predictable horses available, why should someone use valuable resources on problem horses? As an aside, after this episode, I was able to find a 22 year old, retired Arabian show gelding for my niece. In a sense this was somewhat of an unwanted horse, but he now had a definite purpose and he well

deserved it. He is with them still and teaching them how wonderful it can be to work with a horse.

DO WE ACCEPT THAT HORSES ARE A BUSINESS?

Folks, the horse industry is a business (but that doesn't mean all horse owners are trying to be involved at a business level). This industry directly generates \$39 billion to the US economy and has a \$102 billion multiplier impact¹. It provides 460,000 full-time equivalent jobs¹. This industry pays over \$1.9 billion in government taxes¹. In our current economic climate, can we truly "turn" on a business that is providing this kind of impact to the US economy? Yet those who are unequivocally anti-slaughter, who promote the idea that there is no such thing as an unwanted horse, would like us to set aside all economic factors in our decision making related to this issue.

It will be some time yet before all the appropriate data is generated to verify how many unwanted horses exist, but I travel to many different horse farms and many different horse competitions each year. Please trust me, we have a glut of unwanted horses...and the problem has snowballed since the closing of the US facilities that were once slaughtering horses. We are seeing unprecedented numbers of abuse and neglect cases (just do an Internet search for recent newspaper articles related to the topic). For years, there was a place for the "cheap, unwanted horse" to go, or for the horse whose owners had stumbled onto difficult times...that place was the low end auction. My students have told me of recent auctions where horses have sold for \$10 - \$20 apiece; or in other cases, where no bid comes up for a horse at all and the owners leave before the end of the sale. This leaves the auction owner trying to figure out what to do with the abandoned horse.

I believe that each owner has always needed to make a decision about whether the cheap auction was the right place for a horse to go, but at least the option was available. For myself, with horses who followed the social contract, there was never a question of whether I would take a horse to slaughter...even if it meant sacrificing some luxury items for awhile, I was going to find a way to pay for any necessary euthanasia and burial costs that might arise. But, this is me operating as an individual and only needing to deal with this decision about once every 10 years and living in a place where it is actually legal to bury a horse. Is it truly fair to expect a horse business, which has to make this decision multiple times per year, to spend the money on each animal for euthanasia and burial? Is this an ethical decision to just "waste" those potential resources"? Is this an ethical decision to impart our values onto all others? In a country where > 90% of the population consumes beef², is it really such a far stretch to imagine humans in another country wanting to consume a very similar hoofed, herbivorous animal – the horse? Is it environmentally conscientious for us to approximately double the number of horses being buried each year? These are hard questions, but questions that must be asked.

Let's take a country with less economic wherewithal than the US...e.g. Mongolia. Mongolia has a longstanding reputation of being outstanding horsemen; however, they cannot afford the luxury of having horses be strictly pets. Horses are used for all forms of work and riding and at the end of their life, or if badly injured or dangerous, the horse is used as a human food source. It would be ludicrous for these people to even consider the idea of just burying such a valuable resource. But if the animal is dealt with humanely while alive, if it is killed quickly and efficiently, and then its meat is utilized for human nourishment, is this unethical? In my evaluation, it is not.

SOCIAL CONTRACT

Back to this issue of a social contract. For the serious ethicists who read this document, I apologize for my loose translation of this term. It is a concept that my major professor and I spent hours discussing and deciding that it could apply to the reason that (in my mind) it seemed acceptable to slaughter some horses and not others. The conversation began after a debate that another colleague and myself had over whether one of our university brood mares should be sent to slaughter or not. She was over 25, had not produced a foal for several years, had never been trained to ride, and had health issues that were become increasingly difficult to manage. Hence, for a university program, she was essentially just a financial liability. However, this mare had produced several very valuable foals for our farm. She was a pleasant mare who was not difficult to handle. I argued to my colleague that she had held up her part of "the bargain" and we owed her euthanasia or finding her a home where she could be someone's pasture pet. My colleague argued that the method of death probably didn't ultimately matter to the horse and that we could ill afford to spend > \$150 versus making ~ \$400. At the time, I didn't have a follow up argument...other than tears. The tears prevailed, and the mare was ultimately sent for euthanasia, but it took several years before I was able to add anything to my ethical argument. I ultimately decided that we (the university) had a social contract with that mare...she held up her part of the bargain by producing high quality foals and being pleasant to deal with. Ultimately, we held up our part of the bargain by not subjecting her to the stresses of an auction house, being mixed with other horses for travel to a slaughter facility, etc. The method of death itself between a well managed slaughter facility versus a well-trained veterinarian probably does not ultimately matter to the horse...but I had come to realize there was an extra piece of the ethical puzzle, and that was how we, the human part of the equation, end up feeling about our tough decisions. Decisions that leave a person feeling "haunted" are often unethical. It may just take awhile to determine the ethical rationale for the discomfort.

SOME OTHER ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

A person does not need to take high level ethical philosophy classes to be capable of making ethical decisions. Most people, though clearly not all, have an intuitive sense of good ethics (or good morals). Simply put, ethics refers to the "rightness" or "wrongness" of decisions. I often tell people it is like imagining you have a good

angel and bad angel on each shoulder...one is telling you what you know is probably the right thing to do, and the other is telling you something that might be more fun, or easier, but is ultimately the wrong thing to do. Simply following legal rules is not necessarily sufficient for making ethical decisions. Some people allow religious guidelines to assist them in ethical decision making. While this can often be an important factor, it is not always sufficient. To make an ethical decision, we must study arguments, premises, conclusions and validity. Our perceptions, beliefs, and values will all heavily impact our ethical decision making process.

A fundamental principle to this issue of dealing with unwanted horses or dealing with whether equine slaughter is, or is not ethical, is determining which of the following categories most nearly fits your belief system. Are you most nearly a dominionist³ (humans can do whatever we please to animals, especially if it benefits us in some way), are you most nearly a welfarist³ (believes that animals are sentient and humans have a responsibility to act as stewards), or you most nearly a rightist³ (believes that animals have basic moral rights and therefore cannot be used for human ends)?

MY OWN OPINION HAS EVOLVED

When the initial debate about legislation regarding the slaughter plants was being raised, I did not weigh in very heavily. I love horses beyond any sensible, logical measure, and thus the knowledge of how horses are sometimes handled at auction houses, and the realities of long distance transportation for slaughter-bound horses made me reluctant to weigh in on the debate. I have told people repeatedly, it is not the actual act of slaughter that concerns me, rather it is the roughly 72 hours pre-slaughter that concern me. Furthermore, I told various people that perhaps the most compassionate thing that could happen for horses was for there to actually be *more* horse-approved slaughter facilities so that horses had less distance to travel, less handling to tolerate, etc.

However, over the past 12 months, I have come to the unkind realization that there is a worse reality playing out for the horse. Regardless of how accountable we ever make horse breeders and the horse industry at large, there will always be some unwanted horses. The financial responsibility that goes with caring for an unwanted horse is very steep for the average US family or typical horse business. I believe wholeheartedly that the elimination of US options for horse slaughter have led to worse welfare realities for today's unwanted horses. As families experience economic difficulties at a rate not seen in many decades, corners are being cut on feeding horses that can no longer be "dumped". Many of the rescue centers are full; and very few "unwanted" horses fit the bill for donations to universities, therapeutic riding centers, second careers, or mounted police units. In some ways, the closing of the US slaughter plants could not possibly have come at a worse time for horse welfare. In recent times, feed prices have doubled, as have bedding costs, and fuel costs. If that horse that has no where else to go ends up receiving suboptimal care,

possibly even suffering a prolonged malnutrition or starvation, how can this possibly be seen as a positive outcome for horses? The amount of suffering experienced by a horse undergoing starvation is far worse than what a horse will experience going through an auction house and going to a regulated slaughter facility.

CONCLUSION

The horse is a symbol of beauty, grace, and power. It is a cultural icon throughout many countries of the world, but especially in the US. In Kellert's study of American attitudes toward animals (1980)⁵, he found the horse to be one of the top 3 most beloved animals. This perception of the horse has greatly complicated end-of-life decisions for horses. Further adding to the divisiveness is the fact that horse industry personnel tend to classify horses as "livestock" whereas the public tends to classify the horse as a "companion animal." Many people wrote their congressmen and congresswomen about this issue who had never even touched a live horse. But because they categorize horses as beautiful creatures, they could not imagine that having horse slaughter as an option could possibly be an appropriate fate.

It is sometimes stated that 'why can't the horse industry be more like the dog and cat industry' (i.e. not allowing slaughter whatsoever). Estimates show that between 2.5 and 4 million dogs and cats are euthanized at animal shelters each year.⁴ These could be considered the unwanted dogs and cats. By contrast, ~100,000 horses (on average) were going to slaughter when that option was allowed; this is only about 3% of the number of unwanted dogs and cats. The horse industry, in many regards, is already doing a reasonable job of minimizing the number of unwanted animals produced. Very, very few foals are produced just to have a cute play thing for the children...it is simply too expensive to raise a foal for this purpose. Most owners explore every option for a horse before, possibly, making the choice to send it to a cheap auction.

The title of this forum is 'The Unwanted Horse Issue – what now?' Though I know it is unpopular with many, I believe the 'what now' is to re-evaluate whether keeping the US slaughter plants closed is in the best interest of horses. This does not negate our responsibility to work toward reducing the number of unwanted horses; it does not negate our responsibility to explore alternatives for unwanted horses; it *does* require that we re-examine a complicated issue.

REFERENCES

¹ <http://www.horsecouncil.org/statistics.htm>

NATIONAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE U.S. HORSE INDUSTRY

Retrieved May 21, 2008.

² <http://www.beefusa.org/uDocs/beefandmeatavoiders.pdf>

Certain demographic characteristics typify non-beef eaters and meat avoiders

Retrieved May 21, 2008.

³ CAST (Council for Agricultural Science and Technology) Issue Paper, #29, Feb 2005, Agricultural Ethics. Available electronically at http://www.cast-science.org/websiteUploads/publicationPDFs/ethics_ip.pdf

Readings related to the section on ethics: Rollin, B.E. (2000) Equine welfare and emerging social ethics. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)*, 216(8), 1234-1237.

Walshaw, S.O. (2000) Training in ethical decision making. *Lab Animal*, 29(2), 32-34.

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/soc-cont.htm> Social Contract Theory - The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved on May 21, 2008.

⁴

http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nr_fact_sheets_animal_euthanasia

Animal Shelter Euthanasia, American Humane

http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues_affecting_our_pets/pet_overpopulation_and_ownership_statistics/hsus_pet_overpopulation_estimates.html

HSUS Pet Overpopulation Estimates, The Humane Society of the United States

Retrieved May 21, 2008.

⁵ Kellert, S.R. (1980) American attitudes toward and knowledge of animals: an update. *International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems* 1(2), pp 87-119.

Carcass Disposal Options

David L. Meeker, Ph.D., MBA

Vice President, Scientific Services

National Renderers Association

801 North Fairfax Street, Suite 205

Alexandria, VA 22314

INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly, the disposal of animal mortalities and animal byproducts resulting from the production and processing of meat is not uniformly regulated in the United States. Such materials are unstable and frequently contaminated with viral and bacterial pathogens that may spread to other animals and humans. Disposing of such materials without first processing with heat or chemicals to deactivate conventional pathogens is a danger to human health, animal health and the environment. In addition, as cattle mortalities and specified risk materials (SRM) are unintentionally steered away from the rendering industry by well-intended rulemaking, the incidence of improper disposal will increase, as will the potential for public and animal exposure to pathogens. Regulations to provide uniform standards for traceability, biosecurity, and environmental protection are needed. Such regulations would allow only federally licensed or permitted operators to collect, process, and dispose of or recycle all animal byproducts and mortalities.

BACKGROUND

The rendering industry collects and safely processes approximately 54 billion pounds of animal byproducts and mortalities each year in the U.S. However, economic conditions brought on by feed restrictions (21 CFR 589.2000; the “Feed Rule”) to prevent the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and escalating energy costs, have made it necessary for renderers to charge for their services. As a result, the amount of animal byproduct and mortalities that are disposed without proper safeguards has increased. For example, the percentage of cattle mortalities processed by rendering decreased from 56% in 1995 to about 45% in 2005¹.

ROLE OF RENDERING

The rendering industry provides services for the safe collection of animal byproducts and mortalities, transports the materials in biosecure, leak-proof trucks and uses heat (240 to 290° F; 115 to 145° C) to dehydrate and separate the fat and solid materials. The rendering process converts raw animal materials into fat and meat and bone meal, which unless re-contaminated, are free from pathogenic

bacteria, viruses and other conventional organisms and stable for prolonged storage.

Timely processing, processing temperatures, and the concentration of animal mortalities and other animal tissues at a finite number of locations provides the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) with many of the necessary tools needed to prevent disease outbreaks, eradicate diseases, and monitor the health status of animal herds and flocks in the United States. It will be difficult for APHIS to realize their mission if the rendering industry is not utilized to its fullest potential.

MOST DISPOSAL ALTERNATIVES DO NOT PROVIDE ADEQUATE SAFEGUARDS

As a general rule, the cost of disposing of animal byproducts and/or animal mortalities rises in inverse proportion to the environmental impact of the disposal options chosen². The cheapest disposal methods, including burial, abandonment, and low-investment composting, are seldom biosecure because the disposal conditions do little to kill or contain pathogens³.

Composting: Interest in using on-farm composting for the disposal of animal byproducts and mortalities is growing because the practice is perceived to be simple and economical. However, properly designed and managed compost sites are complex, management intense and require significant capital investments⁴. Contrary to popular belief, simply covering mortalities in manure is not true composting. As a result, most attempts at on-farm composting fail because such sites tend to be poorly managed and are not constructed to prevent or contain runoff and protect the environment. Instead of being composted, the materials become piles of rotting tissues and carcasses that offer no more biosecurity than carcasses that have been abandoned.

Burial: Although it is one of the most widely used disposal methods, burial creates the greatest risk to human health and the environment because of the potential for ground and surface water contamination if strict guidelines are not followed.

Landfills: Space is the most apparent limitation to disposing of animal materials in landfills. While rendering and incineration dehydrate the materials to reduce volume, amendments such as sawdust must be added to animal materials before landfilling to accommodate their high water content which increases volume.

Incineration: Because of the high temperatures used, incineration is a biologically safe method if done properly in an approved mortality incinerator. However, current incineration capacity is inadequate for large numbers of animals. Construction of new incinerators requires significant capital investments and is difficult to permit because of air quality issues. Single animal incineration, or cremation, is available for horses at \$800 to \$1600 depending on transport distances.

Alkaline digestion: Alkaline digestion is an effective and relatively new technology that uses heat and alkaline conditions to inactivate conventional pathogens. Prolonged exposure to these conditions for 6 or more hours may also inactivate the BSE agent. However, alkaline digesters have limited capacity, produce large quantities of effluent that must be disposed and are limited in number.

Rendering Compared to Other Disposal Methods: The rendering process provides a reasonably priced means to break the disease cycle. Typical pathogens are destroyed rapidly by processing at lethal temperatures.

Following their experiences with BSE and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), the United Kingdom Department of Health evaluated various methods of animal mortality disposal for potential risks to public health. Compared with landfills and burial, disposal methods that involved heat processing, such as rendering and incineration, were more effective at controlling biological hazards, including food pathogens (such as E. Coli, Listeria, Salmonella and Campylobacter), organisms that cause diseases (such as anthrax, botulism, leptospirosis, bovine tuberculosis, plague and tetanus) and surface and ground water pathogens (cryptosporidium and giardia). Only rendering also minimized the potential health risks to chemical hazards such as dioxins, hydrogen sulfide as well as emissions of SO_x and NO_x.

LOCATION OF RENDERING PLANTS

Many states have rendering plants, but some areas are not served by independent renderers equipped to handle dead stock. The NRA member directory including current locations and contact information can be found at <http://nationalrenderers.org/about/directory>

ENOUGH RENDERING CAPACITY?

A 2005 study commissioned by the American Horse Council Foundation estimates there are 9.2 million horses in the United States. Assuming a 10-year life span, an estimated 920,000 horses die per year. The carcasses of these horses are buried, rendered, or otherwise disposed. USDA statistics show that 66,183 horses were slaughtered for human consumption in the U.S. in 2004, and all of that in two plants in Texas. Canada slaughters about 22,000 horses per year. Thus, passage of the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act or similar legislation should increase the rendering of horses less than 10%. A federal regulation on dead animal disposal would likely increase the proportion of all dead animals, including horses, going to rendering plants. In any case, existing renderers should be able to handle the increased volume with little problem.

EUTHANASIA

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Expert Panel on Euthanasia in 2001⁵ published three acceptable methods of euthanasia for horses: overdose of a barbiturate anesthesia, gunshot, and penetrating captive bolt.

The most common method of euthanasia of horses by veterinarians is by lethal intravenous injection of sodium phenobarbital (trade names, Euthasol or Beuthanasia-D). For aesthetic reasons, most pet food companies avoid using products from companion animals and require products to be free of sodium phenobarbital. If horses were to be rendered with more frequency, alternatives to barbiturates for euthanasia may be desired though the trace residues in by-products would be a minimal risk in pet food or other protein meals.

SURVEY OF RENDERERS ACCEPTING HORSES

In preparation for this conference, the National Renderers Association conducted a survey of renderers known to accept horses. The questions were these:

- Do you take still horse carcasses at your rendering plants?
 - Companies owning approximately 25 plants answered yes.
- How much do you charge to take horse carcasses?
 - Current charges range from \$40 to \$250, depending on distance, market, and volume. Some allow dead horses to be dropped off at the plant for a lesser charge. Some companies don't share this data.
- Do you require the horse to be dead before your employee handles the carcass?
 - Some renderers require the animals to be dead before calling the service.
- Do you provide euthanasia service (will your driver kill the horse)?
 - Some renderers will euthanize horses as a service.
- Do you have any restrictions on the use of sodium phenobarbital by veterinarians for euthanizing horses you pick up?
 - Some renderers will not accept animals treated with sodium phenobarbital. Renderers prefer that sodium phenobarbital not be used to euthanize horses because they market protein meals to pet food companies. Sodium Phenobarbital at very low, diluted levels is not a risk to livestock.
- Have you seen an increase in horse carcasses you pick up in recent months (as a result of the banning of horse slaughter in Illinois and Texas)?
 - Most have seen only small increases. Plants near Nevada have seen significant increases.

National Renderers Association Position on Animal Mortality Disposal

We believe that appropriate safeguards must be used for the disposal of animal byproducts and mortalities in order to protect animal and human health. Regulations requiring animal byproducts and mortalities to be heat or chemically processed (such as with rendering, incineration or alkaline digestion) will certainly reduce animal and human exposure to conventional pathogens.

Because of increasing costs and additional restrictions on cattle materials that can be used for feed, the rendering industry will to restructure somewhat to provide dedicated disposal sites for the collection, processing and disposal of prohibited materials¹. However, without the development and enforcement of disposal standards to ensure traceability, biosecurity and environmental protection, animal-based materials that are banned from feed will be diverted from such facilities and be disposed of by the cheapest (and least appropriate) method available. Regulation of dead animal disposal would enhance human, animal, and environmental health.

REFERENCES

1. Informa Economics Inc., *Economic Impacts of Proposed Changes to Livestock Feed Regulations*, December 2005. On line: http://nationalrenderers.org/assets/economic_impacts_of_proposed_december_2005.pdf
2. Informa Economics Inc., *An Economic and Environmental Assessment of Eliminating Specified Risk Materials and Cattle Mortalities from Existing Markets*, August 2004. On line: http://nationalrenderers.org/assets/economic_environmental_assessment.pdf
3. Hamilton, C. Ross, and David Kirstein, *Animal Byproducts and Rendering: Biosecure Preservation of Sustainable Animal Agriculture*. Presentation to FDA and USDA, August 2002, National Renderers Association, Inc.
4. United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. *Risk Assessment: Use of Composting and Biogas Treatment to Dispose of Catering Waste Containing Meat*. May 2002. Available on the Internet at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/by-prods/publicat/report5.pdf>.
5. AVMA, 2001. Report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia, J Am Vet Med Assoc. 218:669-696

Unwanted Horses: Fact or Fiction

Holly Hazard
Chief Innovations Officer
The Humane Society of the United States
700 Professional Drive
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

INTRODUCTION

As Americans, we like our food fast, our problems solved in a 60 minute drama, and our conflicts resolved *via* the line of least resistance. For the horse, with which we have a complicated and contradictory relationship, this has meant a quiet acceptance or even advocacy by a large segment of the horse industry, on the preference for slaughter to dispose of its “unwanted” horses. Instead of creating mechanisms for horse owners to adequately care for their horses at all stages of life, addressing behavior and training issues and creating suitable homing alternatives for horses who must be sold; the industry is infatuated with the perceived ease and economics of an inhumane solution. Some have even dared to argue that it is best for the horse himself.

The logic that there are too many horses, that they are expensive and that without the “safety valve of slaughter” they would suffer a worse fate of neglect, abandonment or cruelty is not supported by the facts. The reason we are debating their care or fate at all is that there is money to be made by slaughtering horses. The slaughter industry has preyed on the failure of the equine community to adequately take care of its horses and educate its constituents by marketing its services as a viable solution to the mistakes good people make in buying a horse they can neither train nor care for, or the apathetic choices of the equine businessman. These same constituents are desensitized by many horse industry leaders to the trauma and brutality of slaughter and incited to believe that slaughter -- not education, or restraint in breeding or responsibility for the care of a horse for life -- is the only rational approach to a horse without a home. However, with imagination and commitment, the horse industry can not only end horse slaughter and reinvigorate the horse community, it can provide a more positive experience for both the horse and the horse enthusiast.

The fiction is that the slaughter of horses is a solution at all. Horse slaughter is, in part, a **cause of**, not a solution to, the mismatch of horses to responsible homes. The availability of slaughter has led to a prevailing culture and attitude within the horse community that horses are disposable, and therefore lacking in value and not worth any significant investment. They are therefore often condemned to a lack of care, responsibility or training that often ensures their deadly fate. As long as there is a ready killer buyer market for any horse who falls out of favor, the standards of care will be artificially low. The economic analysis a race horse owner, farmer, trainer or rancher might make that would ensure a horse is only bred if there is a strong

market, trained to the best of his ability, and provided for as he or she ages is tainted to the detriment of the horse, and the horse market, because the current consequences for making a mistake, or apathy, or a change of mind, is at worst, a check from a killer buyer for \$125.

The question for us should not be “Unwanted Horse: Fact or Fiction” but “Unwanted Horse: Why?” If that were presented in a rational and unbiased discussion, the argument that slaughter is necessary, or humane would evaporate and we would instead focus on how we should all work together to stop slaughter and promote a home for every horse because slaughter not only damages the horse, it degrades and weakens the horse industry itself.

A “FAST FOOD” SOLUTION

Animal protection groups grapple chronically with the issue of perceived and real overpopulations of a variety of animals. But unlike other animals such as dogs or cats that can produce multiple litters in a year, horses typically only have one foal every eleven months. Almost every foal that is born in this country is born because a person actively decided to breed his or her mare or stallion. In some cases, it’s the thoroughbred farm that produces hundreds of foals in a year. In other instances, it’s the backyard couple who wants to breed their mare because they are hoping to duplicate her wonderful disposition or unique color. In both cases, the end result is the same: another horse, one that will require care, attention and training for decades to come, becomes part of the horse industry in this country.

Even the most carefully planned breeding program cannot guarantee a horse that will win races or excel in the show ring. However, the horse industry has the power, the ability and the responsibility to guarantee that each horse, no matter its breed, age or skill level, has a successful run at life. If a breeder can’t at least aspire to this commitment, he or she should refrain from breeding a mare. This would make each horse, except the most infirm or incorrigible, extremely “wanted.” Unlike virtually any other species on the planet, the fate of the domesticated horse is completely in the control of man.

Not only do we not discourage breeding while we discuss the unwanted horse, our government and equine associations actively provide incentives to add to the problem. Currently, there are a number of federal and state programs that provide incentives and funding for horse breeders, sending a message that breeding can and should be rewarded. These programs, coupled with breed registries that rely on new registrations for the bulk of their funding, send the wrong message to the horse industry—that it’s okay to produce more and more horses, year after year, without having a long-term plan for them. Instead, new programs and funding streams need to be created to aid trainers who are interested in retraining unsuccessful race horses for careers in the show ring or on the trails; educate new and existing horse owners about how to provide appropriate care and training for their horses and to assist non-profit equine welfare organizations that work to find suitable homes for

all kinds of horses. A greater emphasis must be placed on quality over quantity and indiscriminate breeding should be discouraged.

THE GENESIS OF THE “UNWANTED HORSE”

We have all heard a version of the fable of the woman standing at the edge of a river and, noticing a body float by, pulling it out. She then sees another, pulls it out and then many more, until finally, exhausted, she decides to let the bodies float by and run upstream to find out why they are in the river in the first place. This is the solution to “unwanted horses.” It is certainly a solution to slaughter. We need to begin to look “upstream.”

The good news for a path to a home for every horse is that the vast majority are not some cog in a large commercial enterprise. Fifty five percent of the horses in America today live “at a residence with *equidae* for personal use”¹ on a farm with five or fewer equids.² According to the American Horse Council, 44 percent of the horses in this country are used for recreation.³ In many discussions with owners, trainers, livestock boards, and industry leaders, one cause of instability for horses is repeated again and again. It is the prevailing attitude that the solution to a horse’s problem, any problem, is to trade, not train. This attitude is not good for the horse, the owner, or the industry. The only winners are the people who profit from the sale.

The Humane Society of the United States is hoping to call attention to this problem and to elicit support from equine institutions in offering guidance and support to horse owners for making and keeping the best equine matches possible. We have launched our “Horses: Companions for Life” educational program aimed at helping potential, new and seasoned horse owners understand how to make humane decisions for their equine companions at all stages of the horse’s life, The keystone of the program is our recently released book, “The HSUS Complete Guide to Horse Care.”⁴ With this program we hope to educate and inspire horse owners to make

¹ Kilby, Emily R. “The Demographics of the U.S. Equine Population.” *The State of the Animals IV: 2007*. Ed. Deborah J. Salem and Andrew N. Rowan. Washington: Humane Society Press, 2007. 175-205.

² Kilby, 192.

³ American Horse Council. “Horse Industry Statistics”, 2002. American Horse Council. 2002. <http://www.horsecouncil.org/ahcstats.html>

⁴ Harty Erin, and The Staff of the Humane Society of the United States. *The Humane Society of the United States Complete Guide to Horse Care*. Washington, DC: Humane Society Press. 2008.

responsible and realistic decisions before and while a horse is in their lives so that horse ownership is a positive and life-long experience for both the horse and her guardian. We, along with other leading animal protection groups, founded the Homes for Horses Coalition in 2007 to help the horse rescue community increase its professionalism, operate more effectively and have access to greater resources. We also partnered with the Pets911 Pet Adoption Network™ to create a horse adoption network where any 501(c)3 horse rescue organization can post their adoptable horses, free of charge. This site has the same criteria and appeal as the major horse sale sites and is accessible through The HSUS and Pets911 web sites.

We are focusing on this program because, like the victims in the river, the road to the slaughter house begins “upstream.” Its genesis takes place years before a filly is loaded onto a truck. The destiny of slaughter may begin with an 8-year-old girl begging an indulgent parent to buy a perfect pony off the Internet. That animal, sold because she was rated with a temperament of “4,” and was too much for the folks who bought her at an auction, could easily have six owners before she is 10-years-old. She could go through child after child, traded again and again, with no one taking the time to notice an ill fitting saddle, a small limp in her walk, her ignorance of basic horse manners. Another horse may be sold again and again because she cribs, or bucks, or fails to easily load onto a trailer. And along the way, with the auction house open every week, that pony or mare could easily be put up for bid and sold, and in an unlucky stroke of luck, be purchased by a killer buyer and shipped off to Mexico or Canada for slaughter, instead of a loving family who would care for her for life.

Is that horse “unwanted”? Or is she simply unlucky? Whatever she is, a caring, compassionate society could have-should have-saved her life.

Some factors related to the realities with our relationship with horses make a commitment for life difficult. Like people, horses have different personalities and interests. Some love to run, some to take a stroll in the woods, and still others, just graze in the field. If a person is determined to compete in dressage and falls in love with a horse who wants to jump, there is a problem.

There is also the reality that there is an inverse correlation between the age/ability of the horse and his rider. The last thing a novice rider needs is a green, 6-year-old horse. But the rider who starts with a 20-year-old Quarter Horse, then graduates to a 15-year-old Hanoverian and then wants to train a Thoroughbred either has a big barn and understanding parents, or she has had to make a decision to let a horse go.

These issues beg for education and direction from the leaders in this industry. The options of leasing a horse, talking to trainers, making sure there is a fit before any horse is purchased, would greatly reduce the number of transactions...and numbers of homes... a horse has in his life.

For horses bred to compete and win, the road to slaughter begins with an owner with big dreams and no sense of obligation to the animal with whose life he gambles. And in an industry that only needs horses aged two to five, little to no thought is given to the fate of the horse, even if he is successful, for the other twenty to twenty-five years of life. Some in the racing industry have begun to support and even champion the rescue operations that provide sanctuary for the industry cast-offs. This is a great start. But more facilities and opportunities for retraining and equine elder care are needed. There are few pleasure barns in this country that don't have a story about the adoption of an "off-the-track Thoroughbred," picked up at an auction as a "project horse" by a kind or ambitious equestrian. But unfortunately, the "army of the kind" is much smaller in its ranks than the dreamers of a Derby win. And many of the kind find after a few months that the spirit and focus that made the horse a good bet at the track make him difficult and unpredictable in the show ring. And so he is sold, again and again.

With the leadership of The American Horse Council, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, animal protection groups including The HSUS, state and federal agencies and others, we can provide the guidance to horse enthusiasts to really understand the expense and commitment that horse ownership brings. We can provide guidance on alternatives to buying a horse at the first desire to bring one into your life, realistic expectations for dealing with behavior and personality issues, and compassionate and realistic suggestions for what to do when you must part ways, including, if necessary, considerations of euthanasia.

THE FALLACY OF HORSE SLAUGHTER AS PREVENTION AGAINST HORSE ABUSE AND NEGLECT

In the past few months, there has been an increase in media reports connecting the closure of the U.S. horse slaughter plants with an increase in horse neglect, abuse and abandonment. However, the reality is that nearly the same number of horses that were being slaughtered in the U.S. is being exported for slaughter in Mexico and Canada and there is no factual basis to support reports of an increase in abandoned and/or neglected horses.

Research has shown that there is no universal system for tracking abandoned stray or neglected horses and in states that do track such cases, there has been no discernable increase or any evidence to correlate with the media reports. For example, an AP report claiming that horses were being abandoned to fend for themselves on abandoned strip mines in Kentucky has frequently been cited as evidence of an increase in abandoned horses in subsequent news reports. However, a police investigation into this story showed that the horses were all privately owned and had simply been turned out to graze on this land as had commonly been done in previous years. A research team led by John Holland has looked into each of these claims, contacted state officials in an attempt to verify these claims of

abandoned horses and in every instance have found the claims to be unfounded or exaggerated.⁵

The reality is that the total number of horses going to slaughter each year represents only 1% of the total horse population in the United States. This percentage of horses could easily be reabsorbed by existing resources. In the past twenty years, the total horse population in the United States has been steadily growing while at the same time the number of horses going to slaughter has been decreasing. At one time, there were at least twelve horse slaughter plants in the United States. In 2007, before closing due to legislative and court action on the state level, there were only three. If there truly is a relationship between the availability of horse slaughter and horse abuse and neglect, it would stand to reason that when horse slaughter is removed as an option, horse abuse and neglect would increase. The facts show that just the opposite is true. When the Cavel International horse slaughter plant in Illinois burned down and was closed for nearly two years, that state saw a marked decrease in horse abuse and neglect cases. Similarly, in California when the state passed a law prohibiting the selling and transporting of horses for slaughter, there was a 34% decrease in horse theft in the year following passage of the legislation.

The fact is there will always be a certain percentage of the animal owning (dogs, cats, horses, goats, pigs, etc.) population who will not properly care for their animals and as a result, must have their animals seized. These cases can and should be dealt with through legal means and are why every state has laws related to animal cruelty.

CONCLUSION

The proposition that there are large numbers of unwanted horses in this country in need of slaughter can be answered with a resounding “No”. There are many horses in need of the commitment of the people with a stake in the horse industry to take responsibility for reducing the numbers that are bred, educating novice horse owners about proper care and training, creating new equestrian opportunities that allow more people to become a part of the equine community and calling for an end to the unnecessary brutality of slaughter. Anyone who has cared for a horse understands the special connection we have with them. They inspire and delight us. They teach us patience and compassion. They symbolize freedom and strength. We owe them our commitment to adding the same joy to their lives as they do ours. And whether we own them because we care or because we use them in an economic gamble, the least we owe each of them, if we bring them into the world, or purchase them for our entertainment or enjoyment, is to “want” them.

⁵ Holland, John. “The Relationship Between Horse Slaughter and Reported Cases of Abuse and Neglect”. Horsetalk.co.nz, 25, May 2007 <<http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/features/horseslaughter-123.html>

Unwanted Horses: Fact or Fiction

Tom Lenz
Unwanted Horse Coalition
26760 State Line Road
Louisburg, KS 66053

A paper and the power point slides are to be provided in the revised proceedings.

Unwanted Horse: Fact or Fiction?

The need for real data and common understandings.

Professor Karin D. Bump,

Cazenovia NY

“THE WORLD IS NOT THE WAY THEY TELL YOU IT IS” (ADAM SMITH (PSYU))

They tell us that things are either fact or fiction. But what if one person says it is fact, and another says it is fiction? Can it be both? Or is one person “wrong” and the other person “right”? Or is it possible that both can be “right” depending on their perspective on the issue, on their interpretation of the data? They forgot to tell us that the world also consists of faction – the state that exists when fact and fiction both seem to exist. This would be ok... if we knew it was so, and we were able to agree to disagree; but most often what occurs is a state of fractionalization whereby individuals and groups reading the same pieces of information interpret it so distinctly differently that they break off from each other – each with their own interpretations claiming one is fact and the other is fiction. One is right and the other is wrong.

The world is not the way they tell you it is – fact and fiction can exist within the same sentence depending on who is reading it. There seems to be no disagreement on the fact that there is a significant problem at hand with unwanted horses– some might even say it is a crisis, but there is real disagreement and understanding of the underlying factors, causes, and solutions. So where do you begin to tackle a problem?

The basic problem solving model in management theory begins with the identification of a problem and the search to understand why that problem exists. Then, and only then, do you apply a solution to try to solve the problem. Isn't that the approach taken by veterinarians, physicians, engineers, auto mechanics? But in our instance it appears that we have little real understanding of the extent of the problem or the real reasons for its existence. In addition, some can argue that 'solutions' have been applied without knowing whether or not they would even address the actual problem or merely attack some of the symptoms. Colleagues within a profession or an industry, who are committed to finding solutions to problems, need to be equally committed to working together, to find ways to agree to disagree and recognize that perhaps it is not right or wrong, not fact or fiction, but instead a spectrum of views – a state of faction.

Within this paper I will address five areas that I commonly have found to be causes of potential disagreement and/or heated discourse in terms of 'Fact or Fiction' regarding unwanted horses:

- 1) Unwanted horses are actually unwanted
- 2) We know how many unwanted horses there are
- 3) Unwanted horses can be absorbed into the industry through rescue facilities and other placement mechanisms
- 4) We know how much it costs to care for the unwanted horse population
- 5) Things are getting better/ Things are getting worse for unwanted horses.

At the close of the paper, the reader should have a better overview of these five 'Fact or Fiction' areas and the places where common perspectives exist. These commonalities will enable our industry to identify the facts and the common language we could agree to use. If we build where there is agreement, we can move forward to the next step in the problem solving model – identifying the information needed and determining ways it can be gathered in order to really understand what needs to happen for the well-being of these horses.

FACT OR FICTION?: UNWANTED HORSES ARE ACTUALLY UNWANTED.

The first clarification defines what is meant by 'unwanted'. A scan of recent articles in the press and on the internet reveals what is often at the emotional heart of the differing views. While many of the definitions of unwanted horses identify that they may be "considered to be dangerous, or have a medical problem that makes them unusable or financially unfeasible..." (Beaver), these same definitions often include language that points to other reasons for the unwanted status such as "belonging to owners whose economic outlook has changed" (Beaver). The idea that "some horses weren't fast enough, some weren't good enough athletes" (Rhoden) just does not sit well with general public opinion or with many in the horse industry.

It is difficult for many to grapple with the idea that according to USDA statistics, 92% of unwanted horses are in good condition (Goydon). But 'good' means different things to different people. During a survey of horses at a processing plant, it was noted that the horses had poorer foot and body condition and were less sound than horses that would be found at a traditional sales facilities (Ishmael). These animals could still be in good condition as classified by USDA standards for animal handling and transport. The distinction may be that that they were not horses within the range of condition that would be anticipated to be found at a sales facility ready for purchase and immediate use by a horse owner.

Again, the definition of an unwanted horse typically includes the concept that the horse may be no longer suitable for work, may have a medical problem, the owner may have been under economic duress, etc. and all of these situations may result in poorer foot and/or body condition and/or soundness problems. Therefore, in the scenario of being useful for a horse owner, they no longer have a permanent home, they may no longer serve the original purpose, and they may no longer be sound enough, physically or mentally, to be ridden by the average horseperson.

In reviewing definitions from groups who have differing views on this topic, it appears to me that the definitions of 'unwanted horses' are relatively similar. The emphasis on different parts of the definition seems to cause the most conflict. On one side are the groups wholly optimistic that these horses are not unwanted, they have just not yet been matched up with a suitable owner. On the other side are those who are not so optimistic and feel that if there were such saviors they would have already come forward – especially given the position both these horses and the rescue facilities now face and the amount of press that is being given to the topic. While there are many differing points of view on the issue, "Regardless of the reason, these horses no longer have permanent homes" (AVMA) and on that point it seems all sides can agree.

There is another item where agreement may be reached. A number of these horses have lost their permanent homes because of financial circumstances that are related to the troubling economic times. With the rising costs of living, people have to make hard choices. A *Maryland Daily Newspaper* reporter had the following quote from an interviewee on the topic of unwanted horses "Horses are, to a certain degree, a luxury," Varny said "When the economy is suffering, luxuries are suffering" (Gardner). The economic impact of increasing costs of just about everything from daily necessities to boarding fees and the skyrocketing costs of hay from the drought have made it more and more difficult for horse owners to make ends meet. The *Los Angeles Times* states, "In many parts of the United States, horse owners are struggling to feed their animals after a severe drought doubled, even tripled the cost of hay. The drought has exacerbated a glut in the low end of the horse market, brought on by years of over-breeding and the recent economic downturn" (Jarvie). Similar articles are repeated time and again leading to this conclusion, "The only agreement among slaughter proponents and opponents is that the increased costs of fuel and food are issues for horse owners" (Hall). Even NPR radio news carried a story on the topic reporting that horse owners, particularly those in the lower economic end of the horse industry, were abandoning their own horses at boarding facilities because they were unable to pay for their care and upkeep given rising costs and the downward turn of the economy (NPR News).

Unwanted horses – are they actually unwanted? It depends on your perspective. The views are divided, the arguments are deeply embedded. Fact or fiction – faction.

FACT OR FICTION? WE KNOW HOW MANY 'UNWANTED' HORSES THERE ARE.

It seems that most individuals and groups would agree that this is fiction – but there would be disagreement on how to count the population of horses in this category of 'unwanted'. Is this the number of horses that would have gone to slaughter in the U.S.? Does it include those that travel across the U.S. borders? Does this number also include the number of horses that are transient – those horses living in rescue and adoption shelters waiting placement? These are horses without permanent homes. Yes, they have a home today, but the intent is to find them a 'permanent home' and with the perceived rate of closure of rescue facilities, it could

make sense to calculate the number of horses that would have gone to slaughter along with those in transient homes in order to get a real handle on the depth and range of the problem.

There are approximately 9.2 million horses in the United States (AHC) and each year a percentage of these horses become unwanted. Reports have indicated that approximately 1% of this equine population is slaughtered annually (Messer, Ishmael) while others now indicate that it is closer to 1.5% (Sandberg). Until recently, the majority of this occurred within the U.S. In 2006, “according to the USDA, 100,800 American horses were slaughtered in three foreign owned slaughter houses and another 30,000 were sent to Mexico and Canada” (HSUS, Heyde, Jackson). In considering Mexico alone, the increases are staggering. “According to USDA Market News Service, in 2006 11,080 horses were transported to Mexico for slaughter and in 2007 that increased 311% to 45,609 horses” (AVMA). And again, if we just consider Mexico the reported statistics for this year compared to last, given the changes in U.S. horse slaughter, the reported increase is as high as 400% according to the AAEP. These statistics are equally reported by groups who have opposing views on the topic of unwanted horses, and both groups show concern over the statistics. It seems that all can agree that unwanted horses leaving the protection of U.S. borders and U.S. oversight is not a good thing.

The final piece in this group of horses is the transient population – those currently in rescue facilities. It becomes very clear in scanning material on the subject that it is very difficult to determine the number of unwanted horses currently in rescue facilities, or the capacity of rescue facilities since there is no national organization, accrediting agency or central agency for these groups. An article in the *San Antonio Express News* suggested that “the closest thing to it might be the web site of the American Horse Defense Fund – and no government agency regulates them” (Sandberg). The Unwanted Horse Coalition has a place on their web site that lists rescue organization - 200 in both the United States and Canada. Yet there are no registration requirements and the Unwanted Horse Coalition does not provide any oversight (Gregory). Many of these organizations do provide a host of resources as does the Humane Society of the United States, and the launch of their Homes for Horses Coalition in February added another resource for rescue organizations (HSUS). Still, the various groups might agree that there is no real data on how many unwanted horses are in rescue facilities waiting for placement to permanent homes, and at this point, there is no mutually agreed upon organization that could facilitate the coordination of a data gathering and information sharing effort.

In the end, the 100,000 number for horses slaughtered in the US seems to be used relatively consistently in articles and publications with many also acknowledging that no one really has a handle on the actual size of the unwanted horse population. “We do not have reliable statistics on the total number of horses that become unwanted each year. We do know that 90,000 to 100,000 unwanted horses have been sent to slaughter annually, and that the [total] number of

unwanted horses is substantially greater than this.” (AVMA frequently asked questions).

It seems that no one in any group is claiming to have a real handle on the scope of the problem. In contrast, most groups are calling for the need for real data. The Unwanted Horse Coalition has begun to gather some data as have numerous groups already mentioned in this paper. In addition, organizations such as the Equine Science Society (Arns) , the American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists (Arnat), the National Association of Equine Affiliated Academics (Bump), and the American Farm Bureau Federation (Ludlum) are interested in and actively supportive of finding ways to gather real information to advance the knowledge regarding ‘unwanted’ horses.

FACT OR FICTION?: UNWANTED HORSES CAN BE ABSORBED INTO THE INDUSTRY THROUGH RESCUE FACILITIES AND OTHER PLACEMENT ORGANIZATIONS.

Can these horses be absorbed into the industry or will there be no place for these horses to go? This is a fact or fiction debate. Some have felt strongly that the ‘unwanted’ horses that have gone to slaughter in the past “can be absorbed into current horse-rescue facilities” (Ishmael). However, a review of other articles on the subject would suggest otherwise. Tom Lenz of the Unwanted Horse Coalition said “6,000 to 10,000 horses a year can be rescued but both he and Pereschino said the rescue sites can’t handle all the unwanted” (Hall). It is clear that this is a topic of much debate, and it seems that in part this may due to the inability to know and project the current and future capacity of rescue facilities (Messer).

If the current capacity is unknown as is suggested by Messer, then perhaps it is better to work backwards from the number of horses that need care to determine how many rescue facilities would be needed. According to the American Association of Equine Practitioners, that number would be 2700 facilities for the first year of a full ban, with an assumption that there are 30 horses in each facility (AVMA). They suggest that another 2700 new facilities could be needed each subsequent year if the number of additional unwanted horses remained constant and none of the rescued horses died or were placed in permanent homes (AVMA). Those numbers are, however, debated by horse rescuers such as Jerry Finch who in a *Houston Chronicle* article was represented as suggesting that “the numbers going to slaughter are negligible and said such horses could easily be absorbed by rescue groups and families if slaughter was no longer an option” (Sandberg). According to horse rescue advocate John Holland, “It is rare that a population of any kind cannot absorb such a small increase or decrease in supply” (Holland). While in theory this seems to make sense, in reality we don’t know if this will hold true.

There is little doubt that there exists significant disagreement over the capability and the capacity of rescue facilities to successfully absorb the ‘unwanted’ horse population given the current situation of state closure of U.S. slaughter plants. This fact or fiction seems to rest on fact. However, perhaps some agreement can

be reached on a subsequent point. There would be a real benefit in gathering data on the number of rescue organizations in existence, the number of horses currently under care, and the current capacity. In order to do this, it seems there needs to be some agreement on a central oversight and organizing body for rescue facilities and other placement organizations.

FACT OR FICTION?: WE KNOW HOW MUCH IT COSTS TO CARE FOR THE 'UNWANTED' HORSE POPULATION

Do we really know how to budget for the care of this population of horses? According to the Animal Welfare Council, the cost will be \$220 million each year based on 2005 statistics (Ishmael). However, the topic of cost estimates is again a topic of fact or fiction – particularly as the costs are projected forward to subsequent years. It has been suggested by Congressman Bob Goodlatte of Virginia, that the projected number of surplus horses will result in a cost of \$530 million by 2016 (Holland). This has been met with opposition by those who feel strongly that the cost of caring for unwanted horses will decrease each year as fewer unwanted horses enter into the horse industry and more places to care for unwanted horses emerge.

John Holland proposes the use of a fixed percentage rather than a fixed number to calculate a projected cost, arguing that it is more reasonable that the unwanted horse situation should be viewed as a supply and demand commodity whereby once the slaughter houses are closed, the demand will diminish and so will the supply. Therefore the total number of unwanted horses will diminish each year thereby reducing the overall cost to care for them. If his theory were to hold true, the cost estimate to care for the unwanted horse population would dramatically decrease over time rather than dramatically increase as has been proposed by others (Holland).

The lesser debate is the estimated daily cost of caring for an unwanted horse. Horses can live into their 30's and according to the Unwanted Horse Coalition, "the estimated cost of providing basic care for a horse ranges from \$1,800 to \$2,400 annually" (UHC). An average daily cost, without consideration of veterinary and farrier care, has been estimated at \$5 by the American Association of Equine Practitioners (Copeland). However, "caring for a horse with special needs that requires extensive veterinary care can easily double or triple this figure" (Bourgeois). It is important to keep this in mind; it is not uncommon for unwanted horses to require this kind of care, particularly in their early stages of arrival at a rescue facility, as has been noted both in surveys of horses at processing plants (Ishmael) and by those operating rescue facilities (Prada, Sandberg). Additionally, given the potential life span of a horse, the following quote seems particularly noteworthy, "Unfortunately it takes a lot of money to take care of an old horse and we are not in a situation to provide nursing home care for animals in our program"(Robinson).

In researching the views on this topic, it seems that there is some consistency on the idea of daily costs, but much debate on the overall long term-economic impact. This has seemed to cause much fractionalization within the horse industry as well as the general public. Who will pay for these horses and what will be the source of the funds? There is a web site on the internet called the 3 Trillion Dollar Game (3trillion.org) that asks if you can spend \$3 Trillion better than the President Bush – and if so, where would you spend it? Included in the various things you can ‘buy’ is “create and fund sanctuaries for unwanted, neglected and abused horses, donkeys and mules in the U.S. for 6 months” and the price tag listed is \$2.5 Billion. It doesn’t identify how they arrived at this number – a fact or fiction debate for sure – but what is compelling is to look at that figure in comparison to other items you can “buy”, things like “Achieve Universal Literacy” for \$5 Billion or “Cure a Deadly Disease” \$1.5 Million. Regardless of whether the prices listed are right or wrong, Fact or Fiction, there are choices to be made about how money will be spent and who should spend it.

Do we know how much it will cost to care for this population of horses? Fact or fiction – faction in the sense that perhaps in the short term we can provide estimates on a per horse basis but it seems clear that we are unable to have a real sense of what is needed in regard to the complete population. In addition, it would seem that a conversation regarding funding is a necessity. Whether it is a yearly number or a daily number, a fixed number or a fixed percentage, someone will have to budget for these horses and money will have to come from somewhere to cover the expenses.

FACT OR FICTION?: THINGS ARE GETTING BETTER FOR ‘UNWANTED’ HORSES.

THINGS ARE GETTING WORSE FOR ‘UNWANTED’ HORSES.

On the one hand, rescue facilities are getting more phone calls and taking in more horses (Dorell, Hall, Hiers, Sandberg, Thomas, Prada) – and that could point to a better situation – that unwanted horses are finding their way to rescue organizations. However, those ‘homes’ are temporary – a respite along the way to a permanent home. Still, the horse has found someone who wants to care for it. In that sense it is, perhaps, wanted. Chris Heyde, deputy legislative director with the Animal Welfare Institute believes, as do others, that the country can handle these unwanted horses. “You can find a home for these horses” Heyde says - “Most people do” (Dorell).

On the other hand, rescue facilities are getting more phone calls and taking in more horses (Dorell, Gregory, Hiers, Sandberg, Thomas, Hiers, Prada) – and that could point to a worsening situation- facilities are saying they can not take in all the horses, or if they do, they are stretched beyond their capabilities (Dorell, Sandberg, Thomas, Prada *Denver News*). A number of rescue facilities already operate on the brink of exasperation and a rapid influx by well-meaning horse lovers unable to say no could result in unintended harm and the need to rescue horses from rescue organizations. It could result in an uptick in horse hoarders and an uptick in animal

abuse – often unintended. In addition, reports of animals abandoned, turned loose, and turned out into other horse owner’s pastures and facilities appear to be escalating (Cockle, La Valley, NPR News, Prada, Thomas).

News coverage of the issue seems to cross the nation and, it does so in all forms of media from small town news media to big time broadcasts including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time Magazine*, *USA Today*, *HBO Real Sports* with Bryant Gumbell, and *NPR News* to name a few. Through each article review I rarely see anything that says things are getting, or have gotten, better for these horses. I wonder - how can so many people, working so hard, be making such little progress? Is this fact or is this fiction?

FACT OR FICTION – WE WILL MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER AS AN INDUSTRY

I read an article by Bob Whiteley after the tragedy of Eight Belles and I am going to borrow some of his thoughts and words because I think they parallel where we are with this topic. “Change can come, but it will only come as a result of a unified effort.... We horseman are mostly independent minded and competitive people who like to do our own thing. Therefore, the idea of unity may seem alien or objectionable to many of us....[but] United we stand, divided we fall” (Whiteley). At this point we need to set aside our ideas of fact or fiction and no longer be fractionalized. We need to build on what we have in common, which is first and foremost, our love of the horse. We need to set aside our differences for the common good. It is time that we stop talking about what we think we know and start talking about what we don’t know. When we acknowledge what we don’t know, the real learning will begin and real progress will happen. The fact is that we do not know if things are getting better or if things are getting worse – and we need to know.

If past performance is a predictor of future behavior, the idea that we would move forward together as an *industry* would most likely be fiction. But times of crisis can change a prediction model, and human choice coupled with determination can as well. If we each decide to view the topic differently so that we see each piece of information from several perspectives, these unwanted horses would be better-served. If we decided to pool all of our resources together rather than be fractionalized, these horses will be helped significantly. Collaboration will be key.

Where would we be one year from now if all of us agreed upon a single organization that would be a point for data gathering? What would we learn if we collected information to evaluate the real costs associated with care of these horses? Would we have more information for planning and decision making? Information could be gathered on the soundness, body condition, usability, age, gender and the average length of time until adoption. How much farther would we be in our knowledge one year from now? We would have real data based on a collaborative effort and the confidence in the information would be much higher as a result. We might actually be able to say we had some facts.

It might be hard to agree on one single organization, as we know horse people are “pretty independent minded” (Whiteley). But I think we can do it. We will have a better chance if we can get beyond one of the themes of the unwanted horse issue that has grown throughout the past several years, the theme of blame. Unwanted horses are the fault of X. From my perspective there is enough blame for everyone in the horse industry to accept a role. If you or anyone in your family has ever cared for, ridden, shown, leased, or owned a horse that was then sold, then you are part of the unwanted horse cycle. Keep in mind that the American Horse Council estimates that the average horse owner has a horse for 4.5 years. Beyond the host of reasons already covered in this paper that probably culminate in the 4.5 year statistic is also the fact that the horse industry is a livestock industry with professionals who breed, raise, train, sell, and buy horses. We may think of horses as companion animals, and we may treat them as our companions while they are with us, but most dogs and cat owners don’t buy and sell dogs and cats the way we buy and sell horses. Horses are livestock, not pets. Still, the moment we let go of a horse – whether that horse was professionally or recreationally owned, or watch a horse that has in some way been part of our lives go to a new ‘home’, we have in some way participated in the unwanted horse cycle because at the moment we let go, we made the decision we did not want, or could no longer keep, that horse. At that point the horse became a horse in search of a new home and even if a new home was found then, will another be found the next time?

If just about everyone has had a role, where would we be one year from now if everyone in the industry shared in working on this industry wide problem? Where would we be if every breed association created retirement foundations? We have several breed-based retirement foundations already in place and other associations could certainly follow. What if every breed association added an amount to their membership fee and/or their horse registration fee and that fee supported rescue and retirement efforts – either for that breed or industry wide. What if we all paid an extra nickel on each bag of feed as a funding stream? The Maryland Horse Industry Fund has a horse promotion program that operates using this model and they estimate that the out-of-pocket expense to the average horse owner is less than \$3 per horse per year, yet collectively the total funds add up quickly. There are no doubt a variety of systematic ways we could begin to actively address the funding issues involved with unwanted horses in order to directly assist and further develop programs and plans for unwanted horses. Are we ready to do so?

In order to move forward as an industry it seems that two things are important. First, all of the various groups need to join together and collaborate. Second, everyone needs to participate in the elimination of placing blame for the current problem and focus collective energies on working to understand the problem and find real answers and solutions. Rather than a state of fractionalization let’s move forward with the energy of collaboration. We need real data and common understanding and that will require all of us working together. The horses are counting on us.

REFERENCES:

- Arna, Marit (Feb 27, 2008) American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists Incoming President. Personal Written Correspondence with author.
- Arns, Mark (Feb 27, 2008) Equine Science Society President. Personal Written Correspondence with author.
- Associated Press (May 9, 2008): "Texas Stops Shipment of Horsemeat." *The Horse.com*
- AVMA Frequently Asked Questions –
www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/unwanted_horses_faq.asp
- Beaubien, Jason (March 14, 2008): "Lack of Market for Unwanted Horses Creates Glut." *NPR News*
- Bourgeois, Ruth. (Jan 21, 2007) "The Unwanted Horse." *Ezine Articles*.
<<http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Unwanted-Horse&id425078>>.
- Bump – Director of National Association of Equine Affiliated Academics
- Chavez, Andrew (July 11, 2007) "Workload grows for an already burdened animal control unit." *Star Telegram* (Fort-Worth Tx)
- Cockle, Richard (November 18, 2007) "They abandon horses, don't they? The rising price of hay and the last U.S. slaughterhouse's closure put pressure on owners who can't afford to keep their animals." *The Oregonian*.
- Copeland, Sue M. "Save the Horses." *Horse & Rider*.
- Copeland, Sue M. "Slaughter by the Numbers." *Horse & Rider*.
- Denver 7 News (December 29, 2007) "Animals Seized from Horse Rescue." *TheDenverchannel.com*
- Dorell, Oren (March 23, 2008) "U.S. Shelters saddled with unwanted horses." *USA Today*
- Gardner, Karen (Jan 26, 2008) "Equine Emergency Horses are Becoming Casualties of Faltering Economy." *Frederick News Post*
- Gumbell, Bryant (May 12, 2008) "Hidden Horses." *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbell on HBO*.
- Goydon, Raymond, and Stephen Kindel (Mar 12, 2008) *Horse Slaughter: an Unnecessary Evil*. Bethlehem: The Fourth Wall Inc., 2002.
- Hall, Gregory, (April 28, 2008) "Slaughter Vs. Rescue: The rising costs of caring for horses run head-on into the debate over the ban on killing the animals in U.S. for meat." *Courier-journal.com*
- Heyde, Christopher J. (Fall, 2007) "U.S. Court of Appeals Upholds Illinois Ban on Horse Slaughter." *The National Publication of the Hooved Animal Humane Society*
- Hiers, Fred (January 2008) "Buffeted by high fuel and feed prices, owners are giving up their ponies." *Star Banner Ocala*
- Holland, John, (January 23, 2006) "A study of the Relationship between Horse Slaughter and Reported Cases of Abuse and Neglect."
- HSUS (February 11, 2007) "The Homes for Horses Coalition Launches Resource-Rich Website." www.Hsus.org.

Ishmael, Wes (Sept 2007) "Long Live Mr. Ed: The successful attack on horse slaughter says plenty about what animal rights groups are willing to do, and what animal agriculture had better watch out for." Western Cowman

Ishmael, Wes (Nov 1, 2007) "Horse Traitors." Beef Magazine

Jackson, Rachael. (January 2008) "Unwanted Horses Suffer Amid Overbreeding: Rising Costs of Care, Slaughterhouse Ban Lead to Overbreeding." Tribune Business News.

Jarvie, Jenny. (Jan 13, 2008) "Drought is a Hard Time for Horses." Los Angeles Times

KOMU News (April 21, 2008) "Unwanted Horses Increasing." www.komu.com

La Valley, Carol (August 28, 2007) "Horse abandonment becoming a bigger problem." Payson Roundup (Az)

Loos, Trent (April 7, 2008) "Horse issue too heavy of a Load." Feedstuffs – the weekly Newspaper for Agribusiness.

Ludlum, Kelli (May 19, 2008) American Farm Bureau Federation. Personal written correspondence with author.

Lynch, Betsy (date unknown): "Horse Slaughter Editorial." My Horse.com

Messer, Nat T. (2004) "The Plight of the Unwanted Horse." The Unwanted Horse
<http://www.aaep.org/images/files/Messer.pdf>>.

NPR Nation News (March 14, 2008) "Lack of Market for Unwanted Horses Creates Glut."

Perkowski, Mateusz (April 7, 2008) "Activitists fight horse exports to Mexico." Capital Press, The Wests Ag Website

Prada, Paula (January 7, 2008) "As Horses Multiply, Abuse Cases Rise: Boomers bought them but can't afford upkeep." Wall Street Journal

Rhoden, William C. (May 27, 2006) "Barbaro's Fall Shines Light on Dark Side." The New York Times

Robinson, Leslie (May 2, 2008) "Unwanted Horses Dumped on Public, Private Land." Colorado Confidential.

Sandberg, Lisa (October 31, 2007) "Effort to rescue horses strains sanctuaries; Lack of funds, too many animals leave some groups struggling to help." Houston & Texas News. Chron.com.

Sandberg, Lisa (2007) "Horse Rescuers fight to prevent Slaughter." San Antonio Express News

Smith, Adam (psyu) (1976) The Money Game. Random House Inc. New York.

Thomas, Jeremy (Feb 5, 2008) "Shelters brim with abandoned horses: Rising hay costs are problems for owners." Cronkite News Service, Az Central News – Az Central.com

Waller, Douglas (Sept 7, 2006) "Horse Slaughtering: The new Terrorism?" Time Magazine.

Whiteley, Rob (May 12, 2008) "Question of the Month" Column Response in Thoroughbred Daily News.

Commercial Transportation of Horses to Slaughter in the United States Knowns and Unknowns

Tim Cordes, DVM ¹

USDA/APHIS/VS

KNOWN: HISTORY, STANDARDS, AND STATISTICS

One of the responsibilities of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) under the 1996 Farm Bill was to regulate the commercial transportation of horses to slaughter. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated authority to the Deputy Administrator of Veterinary Services (VS). In fulfilling this responsibility, VS initiated a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors. Opinions were gathered from various animal welfare groups — as well as research findings by leading experts in the fields of animal handling, animal stress, and transportation. The USDA working group included representatives from the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS/VS), Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS), Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), and the Office of General Council (OGC). VS was invited to stakeholder meetings which included representatives from the equine industry, horse welfare groups, auction terminals, horse processing plants, trucking industry, and the research and veterinary communities. USDA funded research was performed by Colorado State University on the physical conditions of horses arriving at slaughter plants, by Texas A&M University on the effects of water deprivation in equines, and the University of California, Davis on stress in equines shipped to slaughter facilities. The collaborative recommendations and findings of these USDA, stakeholder, and research groups were as follows:

- Separate stallions and other aggressive horses from the rest of the shipment.
- Provide adequate food, water, and rest six (6) hours prior to loading onto a vehicle.
- Confine horses in a vehicle no longer than 24 (+4?) hours without food and water.
- Utilize an owner/shipper certificate.
- Provide adequate floor space.
- Phase out two-tier trailers.

The Slaughter Horse Transport Program (SHTP) goal was established and remains constant to this day as follows: If a horse must be transported commercially to slaughter, then it will travel in a safe and humane fashion. The program is often cited as a model for the future development of humane transportation programs for other species. The final rule on humane transportation of horses to slaughter was published in the Federal Register on December 7, 2001 . All of the aforementioned recommendations were incorporated into the regulations found in 9 CFR Part 88.

The regulations provide for a complete domestic and international monitoring of the movement of U.S.-origin horses to slaughter through the use of owner /shipper certificates and corresponding backtags. Regardless of whether U.S.-origin horses are processed in the U.S., Canada, or Mexico, the owner/shipper certificates are returned to VS headquarters where all information contained in the certificates are entered into a single database.

The SHTP owner/shipper certificate documents compliance with the regulations which prohibit the transportation of a horse that is (a) unable to bear weight on four limbs, (b) unable to walk unassisted, (c) blind in both eyes, (d) a foal under 6 months of age, and (e) a pregnant mare that is likely to foal (give birth) during the trip. It must be signed by the owner/shipper and is collected by the USDA/FSIS at U.S. slaughter plants. It is collected by the host country officials at the slaughter plants in Canada and the border crossings into Mexico. This certificate was designed to be a trace-back tool to investigate and document program violations. However, it can also be used to provide limited information on the population of horses intended for slaughter. If we query the SHTP database for data each year regarding the (1) addresses of owner/shippers, (2) gender and (3) type of slaughter horses, and (4) horse processing plants of destination, we find informative trends respectively as follows:

1. Owner/shipper operations average 1-3 in most states with few, if any, in coastal states.
2. Stallions represent 3-4% of the total consistent with the gender distribution in the national U.S. horse population (Stull, 1999 ²).
3. Numbers of horses by breeds/types are consistent with the national U.S. horse population (by registry statistics ³).
4. Movement to plants in Mexico and Canada has roughly tripled and doubled respectively in 2007 ⁴.

Administrative judges in Washington, D.C. began hearing cases on violations of the SHTP in June of 2006. To date, there have been five (5) adjudicated or default decisions with penalty awards totaling \$135,000. Out of court, there have been three (3) settled cases with settlement amounts totaling \$23,000.

UNKNOWN: FUTURE OF THE SHTP SHOULD HORSE PROCESSING FACILITIES NOT OPEN AGAIN

- It is anticipated that unwanted U.S. horses intended for slaughter will continue to be transported to and processed in plants in Canada and Mexico.
- The Veterinary Services (VS) Slaughter Horse Transport Program (SHTP) will remain active in the field and at headquarters. Although U.S. plants that process

horses will be closed and therefore not staffed by SHTP Veterinary Medical Officers (VMO) and Animal Health Technicians (AHT), Canadian and Mexican border crossings and Canadian plants will be regularly visited. SHTP Owner/Shipper Certificates (VS Forms 10-13) will continue to be received at headquarters from all of the Canadian plants and the Mexican border crossings.

- The slaughter horse industry divides horses into "killers" (slaughter horses) and "riders" (non-slaughter horses or all others). It is likely that most horses will move through the standard channels as killers with SHTP owner/shipper certificates and backtags. However, in an attempt to circumvent program regulations (9 CFR 88.4), an increasing number may move as riders with Coggins (EIA) tests. The SHTP has no jurisdiction over riders moved in compliance with interstate or international animal health regulations.
- Currently there are five CFIA plants and two SAGARPA EU-approved plants that process horse meat for human consumption.

¹ Senior Staff Veterinarian and National Coordinator for Equine Programs USDA APHIS VS

² Stull, C. 1999. J. Anim. Sci. 77:2925-2933

³ The most current "Total Registered" numbers are compared as relative percentages for the American Quarter Horse Association, Jockey Club, and multiple draft and pony registries.

⁴ SHTP database statistics are generated from information contained within and entered from the Owner/Shipper Certificates (VS Forms 10-13).

Transportation Issues: Knowns and Unknowns

Executive Summary: The Alberta Horse Welfare Report

Jennifer Woods

J. Woods Livestock Services

Alberta, Canada

Calgary, AB, February 12, 2008: A report on horses as food producing animals has been completed by the Alberta Equine Welfare Group. It presents facts on the humane treatment of horses processed in Alberta and Canada for food, identifies areas that need improvement and spells out the impact of the closure of horse meat plants in the US. The aim is to provide a base of information to encourage constructive, open communication on a sensitive issue and address ways to continually improve horse welfare.

The Alberta Equine Welfare Group is comprised of representatives from Alberta Equestrian Federation, the Horse Industry Association of Alberta, Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, Alberta SPCA, the RCMP, University of Alberta, meat processors, feedlot owners, horse buyers and Alberta Agriculture and Food. Most are members of Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC), the organization providing project management services for the group.

The report includes historical data on horse meat consumption. Over one billion people or 16% of the world population eat horse meat. Consumption of horse meat has increased 27% since 1990. In terms of nutritional value, horse meat has 20% more protein and double the iron of beef. Among others, Asians, Europeans and Canadians eat horse meat.

Humane treatment of horses throughout their lifetime and at death is a priority. The report highlights Canadian legislation that is in place and is enforced to ensure the humane treatment of horses, at the farm, at auctions, while in transport and at all federally inspected meat plants. In addition, the report details the USDA regulation that states US horses transported to Canadian meat plants must go on single deck trailers and be inspected by USDA and CFIA veterinarians. The reports notes recent gaps in the adherence to this rule and notes Alberta horse industry requests for action to fix this.

Unlike many US states, livestock are not exempt from Canada's animal protection laws. Studies done by AFAC and the Alberta SPCA and by Dr. T. Grandin point to original owner induced neglect as the core equine welfare concern. The report identifies recommendations to improve this.

The report includes a description of the horse industry in Alberta with respect to horses as food producing animal. Many horses are purpose-raised for meat production. The types of horses received at the Alberta horse meat plant and the humane handling practices in place are outlined. Before the US horse plants closed in 2007, 50,000 horses were processed in Canada for human consumption. By the end of 2007, this number had doubled. A new plant has opened in Saskatchewan with a capacity equal to the Alberta plant. The number of horses imported into Canada has increased by 40%.

The report describes euthanasia options available to horse owners in Alberta. The associated costs and benefits are discussed.

People tend to view their horse as livestock, as working animals or as companion animals. These different viewpoints are acknowledged in this report. What is important is that all horses be treated humanely throughout their lifetime. This must include options for humanely ending the horse's life. This is ultimately the choice of the horse's owner.

It is well known that horse meat plants in the US have been closed as a result of pressure from organizations opposed to horses as a meat producing animal. This report tells of the actions and the resulting consequences of growing horse neglect, abandonment and starvation.

The Alberta Equine Welfare Group believes that processing horses for food is a humane end to a horse's life. This group is committed, and encourages other horse industry groups, to seek the continuous improvement of equine welfare and develop open communication to increase the awareness of the humane approaches to husbandry, handling, transporting and processing of horses in Canada.

The complete report is available at <http://www.albertaequestrian.com/>. Contact S. Church at 403-932-8050.

Little Brook Farm Offers Humane Alternatives for the “Unwanted” Horse

Lynn Cross

County Rte 13, PO Box 127

Old Chatham NY, 12136

Located on 55 acres in the hamlet of Old Chatham, NY, Little Brook Farm is a sanctuary for over 130 animals. Established in 1972, this rescue effort is one of the oldest and largest in the Northeast.

In 1986, B.I.T.S. was created. Balanced Innovative Teaching Strategies, Inc. combines a multi-faceted educational approach with both traditional and therapeutic riding instruction. Presently, B.I.T.S. provides services to more than 80 schools, agencies and organizations, entirely through the use of previously "unwanted" horses. Over 2,000 individuals participate annually. B.I.T.S., a non-profit (501-C3) entity, has been recognized by the New York State Department of Education as "exemplary".

Little Brook Farm directly cares for 50 horses representing 18 breeds with an additional 23 in adoptive homes (which must return the horses if they can no longer keep them). It is our policy to never buy (unless it is per pound) nor sell or breed and to humanely euthanize a horse only when their quality of life is compromised.

There is a common misconception that "unwanted" horses are old and/or lame when they are typically young and potentially useful. Statistics on 70 horses rescued from intended slaughter by Little Brook Farm during the 5 year period from 2001-2006, illustrate the fact that 46% were 6 months of age to 9 years, 37%; 10-15 yrs., 4%; 16-20 and 13%; 21-35 Given a life expectancy of 30+ years for a well-cared for horse, fully 87%, which must be considered representative of the for-slaughter market, have time for rehabilitation and meaningful, useful companionship.

Unlike the typical rescue or sanctuary, the majority of our horses contribute on some level to their own care through lessons, lease or educational programs. They also successfully compete in Dressage, Hunter Seat, Eventing, Competitive Trail Riding and Pony Club Rallys, as well as other disciplines. This visibility places them in a position to raise awareness as to the true value of the "unwanted" horse. Last fall, Congresswoman Kirsten Gillibrand unexpectedly attended one of LBF's horse shows during the vaulting demonstration. She took the time for a tour and has since changed her position on the slaughter issue in favor of the horses - a decision which is deeply appreciated.

There is an obvious benefit for the "unwanted" horse through rescue, rehab and ongoing supportive care. Equally beneficial however, are the vast educational and vocational opportunities horses offer students. Little Brook Farm and the B.I.T.S. program have successfully blended "unwanted" horses and educational programs by prioritizing the physical safety and emotional well-being of our students which then, by default, allows our horses to receive the same. In order to achieve the

greatest results, the partnership of horse and teacher is crucial. Strengthened by time and patience, a long term relationship is an absolute necessity.

Placing the best interests of the students and horses over profit has required a creative approach to financial management. Operating costs are significant and resources have always been limited. (B.I.T.S. 2007, 990-EZ was \$85,285.) Our solutions have evolved over time to include the following:

- Providing traditional riding instruction and summer camps (see attached flyer)
- Participation of schools, youth groups and organizations for which we are paid on a sliding scale (actual list provided upon request)
- Schools serving those with special needs, schedule class trips bringing the children's therapists with them thus eliminating B.I.T.S.' responsibility to provide Physical, Occupational and/or Speech Therapists
- Fundraising events such as horse shows, clinics, weddings on site
- Donations generated from random news stories
- A silent corporate sponsor generously contributes a fixed amount monthly in addition to the wages of 2 paid staff;
- Individual sponsors donate each month towards the care of a specific horse who then visit on a regular basis
- Various local landowners allow LBF to use approximately 35 acres of pasture at no cost. (all have 4 board fence, barns, potable water). LBF assumes complete physical/financial care of the horses and offers owners LBF's agricultural tax benefits and/or care of the owner's private horses
- Grants
- 12 working students, both high school and college – an exchange may include: room and board, transportation including gas, riding and lessons
- Volunteers/board members contribute approximately 70 hours each week
- Local excavation company trades the use of an acre of our land for topsoil and is always available - any time, any location, any weather conditions to bury a horse
- One of our 2 farriers donates all of his work (trims), the second donates 1 out of every 6 (shoeing)
- Our vet (of 25 yrs) comes for any emergency at any time within minutes of the call. He allows me to pay over time with no penalties.

Little Brook Farm, as an equine educational center, places a great deal of emphasis on responsibility. It is our duty to provide for horses throughout their life and ensure them a dignified death. Equine cruelty is the fear driving the opposition for the ban on slaughter. Yet, the prolonged suffering and brutality of slaughter *is* equine cruelty and should never be an option.

It is understood that there are more horses than available homes, therefore, continuing to breed without consequences is intolerable. By adding a fee for each breeding and registration, funds would be available for rescues, sanctuaries and the ultimate euthanasia of “unwanted” horses.

In the summer of 2007, Little Brook Farm had the privilege of hosting a clinic with Linda Tellington-Jones, an internationally acclaimed authority on animal behavior, training and healing. She stated that while there are many patterns for rescues, this is one that should be duplicated and has offered to serve on our advisory board. Little Brook Farm and B.I.T.S. is a viable model and could be expanded and recreated in other locations throughout the country.

“The Unwanted Horse Issue: What Now?” Potential Solutions and Options

Tom Persechino,

Senior Director of Marketing, American Quarter Horse Association

To millions of Americans, horses have long been magical, mystical creatures that have carried us when even our own legs couldn't, brought us joy when no other human understood us and teamed with us to settle a nation. Our horses ask for so little, and yet they're willing to give so much. In many ways, horses were man's best friend long before the first canines assumed that title.

Often, our horses become part of the family and transcend the role of traditional pet. They become our trusted equine counterparts.

Because of that bond and in a perfect world, it would be ideal for every horse to live out its days in rich green pastures or in our backyards. Unfortunately, that's not always the case because all horses and all owners are not created equally.

Just as you'll find dogs and cats in shelters with behavior problems, health issues or owners who simply cannot afford to keep them, those same situations play out in the equine world – only with larger ramifications. You're talking about a 1,000-pound animal that is expensive to feed and care for, can be dangerous if not properly trained and for whom even euthanasia is expensive. Slaughter is no longer an option, and publicly funded shelters for horses are not widely available. So what are owners to do?

Understanding options for the unwanted, unneeded or unusable horse is one of those topics we must all address if we're ever going to ensure that our horses' health and welfare truly are paramount to every other consideration.

When considering an unwanted or unusable horse, we need to be realistic. No matter what we discuss and no matter how many laws we might pass we will never prevent all horses from becoming unwanted – just as we can't prevent a certain number of dogs and cats from becoming unwanted. However, by discussing the issue and seriously dedicating ourselves to bringing forth viable solutions, we can strive to make life easier for those horses that do end up in the equine welfare system.

Whatever the reasons, many horse owners will face the difficult decision of dealing with an unwanted or unusable horse. *What are some of their options?*

EDUCATION AND OVER BREEDING

To some, a simple solution to “fix” the unwanted horse situation is to simply stop breeding as many horses or force the various breed associations to limit the number

of horses they allow to be registered each year. On the surface this might sound simple, but forbidding people to breed horses isn't as easy as it might appear. As breed registries, the associations' primary roles are to record the pedigrees of horses. It is not their role to restrict any breeder's right to breed their horses. In fact, courts have ruled that in certain cases, it is a restraint of trade to do so.

However, clearly, education is a key to alleviating some of America's unwanted and unneeded horses, and as an industry we need to work to better educate horse owners on responsibilities that come with owning a horse. .

The issue of education is being addressed nationally through the efforts of the Unwanted Horse Coalition of which the American Quarter Horse Association is a founding member.

Formed in 2005, the Unwanted Horse Coalition represents a broad alliance of equine organizations that have joined together under the American Horse Council to educate the horse industry about the unwanted horse issue. The Coalition brings together key stakeholders to develop consensus on the most effective ways to work together to address this issue of America's unwanted horses.

The mission of the Unwanted Horse Coalition is to reduce the number of unwanted horses and to improve their welfare through education and the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety, and responsible care and disposition of these horses.

Today, the coalition comprises 24 organizations that include horse breed associations, veterinary organizations and stock contractors, among others.

Central to the coalition's mission is its "Own Responsibly" adage that focuses on education. By educating existing and potential owners, breeders, sellers and horse organizations about the long-term responsibilities of owning and caring for horses, and focusing on opportunities available for these horses, the coalition hopes to help horses before they become unwanted. The UHC hopes to utilize industry resources to put owners of these horses in touch with individuals and facilities that will welcome them.

The coalition believes teaching people to own responsibly will help lower the number of unwanted horses.

Education has been a fundamental part of AQHA for decades. As part of the association's ongoing efforts and to fully support the Unwanted Horse Coalition, AQHA has just released a DVD that it provides free of charge – only a \$5 shipping fee applies – to anyone interested in horse ownership. This educational DVD talks about the many aspects of horse ownership and educates people on the costs and responsibilities of owning a horse.

Additionally, AQHA recently introduced a comprehensive Fundamentals of Horsemanship program designed to help people create a better relationship with their horse by learning better training techniques.

By educating potential and current owners, fewer horses will become unwanted because people will better understand the issues that surround horse ownership.

Despite these efforts, some owners will still find themselves with an unwanted or unusable horse.

Let's define those terms. *Unwanted* horses no longer fit into their owners' lives, for reasons discussed above or because of other contributing factors. They are healthy enough to enjoy life, but perhaps it's time for them to find a new purpose. They are still usable – even if it's in a diminished capacity. *Unusable* horses are those who are in poor health – because of illness, age or injury. Unmanageable, dangerous horses also fall into this category. They are a burden to their owners, and it would be the height of irresponsibility to sell or give horses like this to another person, or to risk them being abused, neglected or abandoned because a future owner can no longer deal with them.

It's important to candidly assess which category a horse falls into, and there are different options for each one. For owners who believe a horse still has some use, there is good news and a number of options.

USABLE HORSE OPTIONS

Rescue and Retirement Facilities

Probably the most obvious are rescue and retirement facilities.

Rescue and retirement facilities can play a key role in providing care or finding new owners for horses that are considered unwanted.

While the actual number of facilities is unknown, it is widely believed that existing ones are at or near capacity in terms of numbers of horses and resources to care for them. It simply stands to reason that more will have to be established if this is going to be a primary option.

Additionally, if the existing equine welfare system is going to be expected to absorb more unwanted horses – regardless of the number – guidelines for these facilities must be established in order to ensure the horses' best interest are paramount. While the majority of rescue and retirement facilities provide adequate care, a small minority of rescue/retirement facilities do not and cast a shadow over the legitimate ones.

While the vast majority of rescue and retirement facilities are run honestly, if our goal is to protect horses then serious steps must be taken on the horse's behalf. Until such legislation exists, the UHC encourages owners to read the "**Care Guidelines**

for Equine Rescue and Retirement Facilities," developed by the American Association of Equine Practitioners and ensure the facility being considered operates by these guidelines.

A partial list of equine rescue and retirement facilities can be found by using any search engine on the World Wide Web or by contacting the American Horse Council.

Friends With Land

Many horse owners have friends who own acreage that is suitable for horses (safe fencing and sufficient access to good grass and water). Perhaps there is an opportunity for some owners to ask a friend if they can retire a horse to his pasture. In some cases, the owner of the horse might offer a nominal payment each month for the retirement.

However, if a horse has injuries or health problems, pasturing might not be a good option unless the horse can get regular veterinary attention.

Colleges and Universities

Many colleges and universities use horses for their equine programs or for research programs that benefit the industry. Selection criteria for horses will vary according to the university, but as an option, an owner should check in his or her state (or neighboring states) to see if there are colleges or universities that would be willing to take a horse. In many cases, these horses receive excellent care from the students attending the school.

North American Riding for the Handicapped Association Inc. (NARHA)

Members of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association foster safe, professional, ethical and therapeutic equine activities through education, communication, standards and research for people with and without disabilities.

NARHA promotes equine-facilitated therapy and activity programs in the United States and Canada. More than 650 NARHA program centers serve 30,000 individuals with disabilities. Each year, dozens of new centers initiate programs, and thousands of individuals profit from these beneficial activities. NARHA has stringent care guidelines for horses at these facilities.

At NARHA centers, horses are valued partners in a relationship and the centers are highly selective, accepting only horses that are well-suited for equine-assisted therapy. Many horses at NARHA centers are donated, volunteered or leased by horse owners in the community.

It is important to note that minor health issues in a horse might be acceptable. However, horses must be sound enough to work regularly. Above all, safety is a top concern, and horses donated to a NARHA facility must have the correct temperament.

Centers will evaluate and observe a prospective horse's:

- Conformation
- Health
- Age
- Gaits and manner of going
- Attitude, reliability and adaptability

By donating a horse, an owner not only assists individuals with disabilities, but might also be eligible for a tax deduction. In many instances, an owner can develop an ongoing giving campaign with the NARHA center that has accepted a horse and enjoy the tax benefits for years to come. Owners should note that if a horse is accepted by a NARHA facility and for any reason doesn't fit their program at a later date, the facility has the option of selling the horse.

A list of NARHA facilities is available at www.narha.org.

New Careers

Depending on the horse's health and soundness, a second career might be a viable option. For example, many American Quarter Horse race horses go on to become outstanding speed-event horses in the show arena or top mounts for ropers and other cowboys competing in rodeo events.

If a horse excelled in the show ring, an owner might consider giving him to a young person in 4-H or someone just beginning his or her show career. Again, depending on the horse's overall health, an older horse that one owner might consider past his prime could be the perfect teacher for a young person or new competitor.

A second career could include public service. Thousands of horses are serving as police mounts, in U.S. Border Patrol units, patrolling America's parks, working in correctional facilities and assisting search-and-rescue operations.

Owners should look around their area and visit with police, sheriff and parks departments to see if they have mounted units.

UNUSABLE HORSES OPTIONS

Euthanasia

When it comes to the unfortunate task of seeking alternatives for the unusable horse or if it's simply impractical to continue a horse's life, there are fewer options available.

Although euthanasia is a difficult decision, it gives the owner total control over the way a horse's life comes to a conclusion. Additionally, euthanasia can be the most humane way to deal with end-of-life decisions. Certainly, it is more humane than neglect or abandonment.

The decision to euthanize a horse should be based on both medical considerations, as well as the horse's current and future quality of life.

The following criteria suggested by the American Association of Equine Practitioners (not all criteria need to be met for every case) should be considered in evaluating the necessity for euthanization of a horse:

- Is the horse's condition chronic, incurable and resulting in unnecessary pain and suffering?
- Does the horse's condition present a hopeless prognosis for life?
- Is the horse a hazard to itself, other horses or humans?
- Will the horse require continuous medication for the relief of pain and suffering for the remainder of its life?
- If the horse is suffering but treatable, is proper and recommended care of the horse within the means of the owner or rescue/retirement facility, such that the health and safety of the other horses are not compromised?
- Is the horse constantly and in the foreseeable future unable to move unassisted, interact with other horses, or exhibiting behaviors that prohibit a decent quality of life?

When it's time to make this difficult end-of-life decision, it is recommended that an owner contact an American Association of Equine Practitioners veterinarian to handle the euthanasia process and disposal of the horse. In many areas of the country, there are laws governing the burial or disposal of horses following euthanasia via intravenous anesthetic. Owners need to be aware of these regulations, as well as the costs associated with euthanasia and disposal, which can reach several hundred dollars.

Because many municipalities have regulations that restrict where and how a chemically euthanized horse can be disposed, if a ban on horse processing is to continue, Congress needs to explore the option of publicly funded euthanasia facilities akin to animal shelters that accept small animals now.

Recently, AQHA attempted to call the largest 100 metropolitan areas – or designated market areas as defined by the federal Government Office of Management and Budget – to see if their public animal shelter had the capability of taking unwanted or unusable horses.

AQHA's study revealed that of the 70 shelters we reached only four had the capacity to handle horses. Until there are widespread, publicly funded facilities to take horses – such as those that exist for dogs and cats – the welfare of America's unusable horses will be at risk. The horse industry, humane groups and the United States government need concrete statistics on the availability of facilities and the accessibility of affordable euthanasia as we develop viable solutions.

Research Programs

Depending upon a horse's level of usability and medical condition, many university veterinary programs are looking for horses that can be used in research projects. In some cases, donating a horse to a research program could lead to better care or even cures for diseases and disorders that would benefit all horses. Owners can ask an AAEP or American Veterinary Medical Association veterinarian for advice.

Legislative options

Obviously, our efforts cannot stop with what has already been done. Because this issue has been before Congress, perhaps there are other options that can be discussed with our elected officials, both locally and in Washington. Is there a common ground that could be supported by a good portion of the horse industry?

Clearly, the closing of the United States' three equine processing facilities *has not* meant better care for horses nor a better horse industry overall. But we're not here to debate the merits of horse slaughter.

Should we, though, be speaking with our elected officials about ways to protect our horses that makes sense and is based on facts, not beliefs or feelings?

For instance, because city animal shelters are ill-equipped to take in horses, should we explore legislation to establish publicly funded equine shelters like we do for dogs and cats? Horses would have a certain number of days to be adopted out and, after being given the chance, would be humanely put down.

Because education plays a key role in reducing the number of unwanted horses, can an educational grant program be implemented through the United States Department of Agriculture where nonprofit horse industry organizations could apply for funding to develop and implement educational programs, similar to what is being done with the National Animal Identification System?

Additionally, because many municipalities restrict where and how a chemically euthanized horse can be disposed, is it an option to seek federal tax credits for owners who do euthanize to help offset some of the associated costs? Or can we

assist local authorities and establish affordable euthanasia facilities perhaps at auction and sale companies because of their availability? This could provide owners with a readily available, economical way to euthanize a horse.

Association Options

Because enacting legislation is often a lengthy process with strong emotions on all sides of the issue, what are some additional initiatives associations like AQHA – and perhaps the Unwanted Horse Coalition can enact independently of Congress?

At AQHA, we are in the initial stages of developing a program through which any owner of a horse can have a notation placed on the horse's certificate of registration indicating that, should the horse need a retirement home, that owner will take the horse back. The program does not mean any money will change hands, but simply provides an alternative for owners who sell a horse and later want to provide for its well-being.

Additionally, we also are exploring the possibility of establishing an online adoption service where members could list horses that might need a home. The concept attempts to connect adoptable horses with suitable homes.

As previously stated, AQHA – and other equine associations – cannot limit the number or even types of horses being bred. However, we want owners to understand the benefits of spaying and gelding, or neutering. At AQHA, we don't believe every horse should be bred. Sometimes, the key to reducing the numbers of unwanted horse is for owners to not produce horses at all. At AQHA, we do not necessarily advocate breeding *more* horses, but we are advocates of *better* horses, who remain marketable. As a breed registry – and not a supplier of horses – AQHA is trying to do all it can to encourage its members to produce just that – good, well-broke and well-trained horses that can meet the market demands.

Creativity

It's been said that creativity and ingenuity can solve almost anything, and when it comes to America's unwanted horses, imaginations really must come into play; we all have to "think outside the box."

To increase attention to the plight of America's wild mustangs, the Mustang Heritage Foundation developed its Extreme Mustang Makeover, where trainers take wild mustangs, train them for use and later adopt the animals out.

The unconventional event casts a spotlight on – but more importantly provides homes – for a number of Mustangs that might otherwise be considered unwanted. Additionally, the Mustang Heritage Foundation provides information and education about mustangs and burros to those in attendance.

Perhaps a similar program should be explored for breed associations.

An AQHA event designed to showcase the ability of horses that are usable but because of current economic times or lack of proper training might be at risk of winding up as unwanted or unneeded is the Fundamentals of Horsemanship Futurity. This concept, based on AQHA's Fundamentals of Horsemanship curriculum, will bring breeders and trainers together to showcase the talents of and provide a market for trainable young horses.

A pilot Fundamentals of Horsemanship Futurity will occur in 2009.

The Kentucky Quarter Horse Association is launching its Quarter Horse Breeders Challenge Sale and Futurity later this year. That event will:

- Promote quality American Quarter Horses that ride well and have the capability to work.
- Create an incentive to develop and train all horses in a humane manner, protecting at all times their physical and mental potential.
- Promote resistance-free training methods resulting in a more efficient horse and to establish a greater market for quality American Quarter Horses
- Provide an event that is enjoyable to spectators.
- Provide an event that is beneficial to the horse industry.

Whatever new programs we launch, our creativity can play a vital role in helping America's horses.

Our horses do give us their very best – that's what makes horses so special. At the very least, we need to change the way we view horses and horse ownership. If we are going to defend a person's right to own horses, then we must also recognize that with that right comes responsibility.

Banning horse slaughter doesn't address the underlying causes of why horses become unwanted. As an industry we *can* work together, reduce the numbers and create compassionate, workable solutions.

Groups Involved In Horse-Related Work

We have developed this list for informational purposes only. We suggest that you do an Internet search for these organizations in order to view their mission statements, position statements, etc. We do not accept responsibility for accuracy of information presented at these web sites, nor do we state agreement/disagreement with their positions. Inclusion on this list was based on groups who contacted us and asked to be placed on this list.

Alberta Farm Animal Care

American Association of Equine Practitioners

American Horse Council

Animals' Angels USA

AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association)

Animal Welfare Council

Animal Welfare Institute

CANTER – providing new careers to Thoroughbreds retiring from racing

DonateMyHorse - “The #1 place to donate a horse or adopt a horse online”

Equine studies at the University of Maryland

Finger Lakes Thoroughbred Adoption Program

Fur Commission USA

Homes for Horses Coalition

Horse Quest – information portal for credible, reliable equine information

Humane Society of the United States

International Society for Equitation Science

Kentucky Horse Council

Lifesavers Wild Horse Rescue

My Horse University – online equine learning opportunities

Ohio Horseman's Council

Rerun – Thoroughbred adoption program

Thoroughbred Charities of America

Unwanted Horse Coalition

Veterinarians for Equine Welfare