Investigation of Bouvry Export Feedlots and Slaughter Plant 2014 Report
Introduction
There are currently two EU approved horse slaughter plants in Alberta: Bouvry Exports Ltd. and Canadian Premium Meats. Bouvry Exports operates the largest horse slaughter plant in Canada. It is situated outside of Fort Macleod, a small town in Southern Alberta. Bouvry owns/leases more than 2000 acres of land around Fort Macleod, where US and Canadian horses purchased at auctions are fattened up in large feedlots. However, Bouvry also breeds horses for slaughter. Thousands of horses are kept in these feedlots any given day to ensure a reliable and steady supply for the Fort Macleod plant. Bouvry also operates the large “Bar S” feedlot in Shelby, Montana, which serves as additional collecting station for horses purchased at US auctions. Many of the US horses arriving at the Shelby feedlot already have gone through several long distance transports.

In October 2012, our investigators documented that conditions at Bouvry’s feedlots were poor. The horses did not have any shelter from sun and snow. Most of the horses observed were obese, their hooves neglected. Our observations suggest that the massive feedlots are operated with only a few workers who focus on ensuring that the feed troughs are never empty.

It is questionable if animal welfare problems, injuries and diseases are detected in a timely manner. Investigators witnessed a medical emergency that was only addressed after several hours and after law enforcement had been contacted. A foal died during birth and its mother was left in agony for hours, instead of getting immediate veterinary help.

During this year’s investigation, we found that conditions at Bouvry’s feedlots have not improved. The only thing changed were the security measures. Gates were closed and Bouvry’s workers were always watching for intruders, making it extremely difficult to document conditions. Investigators were followed, observed and threatened.
Investigation:

1. Bar S Feedlot, Shelby, MT

The feedlot, operated by Bouvry Exports Calgary, is located very close to the Canadian border and serves as a collecting station and feedlot for US horses purchased at auctions.

Location:
The feedlot is located off Highway 2, east of Shelby, Montana. The feedlot is not visible from the road, as railway tracks block the view.

Observations:

10/16/2013
The investigators arrived at the Bar S Feedlot at 10:10 am. It was raining and the temperature was 40°F. The horses had no shelter from the rain. There was some hay and straw for the foals to lie down on, but it was soaked from the heavy rain. The horses observed were of different breeds. The holding pens appeared very crowded. The front paddock for mares with foals is spacious, but surrounded by barbwire fencing.
At 11:00am, a fully loaded truck arrived. It was a black freightliner #58 from Cut Bank, Montana. According to the inscription visible on the door, it belonged to Whitford Livestock. At 11:20am, the workers started to unload the horses, using moving paddles and sticks. No slaughter or auction tags were visible. Some foals and colts were unloaded with the adult horses. In the European Union, they would have to be transported separately, as the risk of them being trampled is very high\(^1\). At 11:27am, the unloading was finished and the horses were moved into a holding pen.

\(^1\) According to EU Council Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport, it would not be allowed to transport foals without separating them from the adult horses. If they are unweaned, each foal would have to be separated together with its mother. Article 1.12 of Chapter III of Annex I states that “Animals shall be handled and transported separately in the following cases: (b) animals of significantly different sizes or ages”.

2:15pm: It finally stopped raining. A lot of horses were observed fighting, kicking and rearing up. Some horses seemed aggressive, a behaviour animals can develop in crowded conditions. At 3:50pm, a black
truck with “Jacobs Rodeo” trailer arrived empty at the feedlot and parked next to the holding pens. The workers were observed moving horses around, but the truck was not loaded until the next morning.

10/17/2013 - 38°F
When the investigators returned to the feedlot at 8:00am, the “Jacobs Rodeo” trailer was already parked at the loading ramp. The truck was operated by D&J Livestock from Great Falls, Montana (DOT 053541). Feeding activity was observed. At 9:10am, the loading started. All horses were slaughter tagged and the workers used plastic sticks with flags to move them. One horse was reluctant enter the trailer and the worker started hitting it hard with the plastic stick.

At 10:00am, the truck and his solo driver left the feedlot. Shortly afterwards, he stopped at a truck stop in Shelby to get snacks. At 10:15am, he left Shelby and continued driving north towards the Canadian border.

At 2:10 pm, a white truck with single deck trailer from Dally Farms in Jerome, Idaho (DOT 787912) arrived loaded at the feedlot and immediately started unloading the horses. They all seemed to be in good condition and walked off the trailer without problems. At 2:30 pm, the unloading was finished.

The investigators observed the feedlot from a nearby hill. Some pens were very crowded. Again, a lot of horses were observed running, fighting and playing. The horses had water and food available, but no shelter. The feed troughs were full and many horses were eating. Hay bales were seen in only a few of the pens. Most horses were in good physical condition, some were quite overweight. However, the investigators noticed several thin horses in a pen in the middle of the feedlot.
3. Whitford Collecting Station, Cut Bank, MT

10/17/2013
12:00 pm: Investigators arrived at the Whitford horse collecting station in Cut Bank, who had delivered horses and foals to the feedlot in Shelby the previous day. The collecting station is located outside town. On the premises are a private residence and a small barn. A single deck & a double deck trailer as well as several smaller stock trailers were visible. Straw bales were piled up around the pen area, making it difficult to see the horses from the road. There were approx. 30 to 50 horses in the holding pens, mainly foals. The pen was covered in manure and mud. It was not clear if all the horses had access to the small barn. In an adjacent field, the investigators found bones and two horse skulls. There was also trash pit, where they found a hip bone and numerous other bones.
4. Trailing from Shelby feedlot to the Bouvry slaughter plant

Overnight, the temperature had dropped to 29°F and the ground was frozen. When investigators arrived at the feedlot at 8:40am, a D&J Livestock truck from Great Falls, MT was already backed up to the loading ramp. It was the same truck as the day before. At 9:20am, the loading started. Flags were used to move the horses onto the trailer. Each horse was in good condition and was loaded individually. At 9:30am, a green Vanee Livestock truck from Fort Macleod, AB arrived at the feedlot. Shortly after, the D&J truck left and the Vanee truck pulled up to the ramp. The horses were loaded in large groups. They were not as well-fed as the other horses, some were even quite thin. At 10:00am, the loading was finished.

At 10:15am, the Vanee truck left and the investigators followed. At 11:10am, the truck arrived at the Sweet Grass border crossing and pulled into the inspection area, where the horses and papers were
checked by a CFIA veterinarian. At 1:55 pm, the Vanee truck arrived at the plant. The total transport time was 3hrs 40 min.

5. Bouvry Exports slaughter plant, Fort Macleod, AB

The Bouvry plant is one of four federally registered horse slaughter plants in Canada. It is also registered to slaughter cows, sheep, goats, elk and bison. It is located east of the town of Fort Macleod. Claude Bouvry is the owner of Bouvry Exports Calgary Ltd.

Address:
254072 Township Road 92 / Highway 3
Fort Macleod, Alberta

Bouvry’s slaughter plant and holding pens
10/20/13
The slaughter plant consists of several buildings and a vast pen area surrounded by a high privacy fence. Close to the holding pens is a large manure pile. The front pens next to the plant entrance held a group of approx. 20 horses, likely the next ones to be slaughtered. Auction tags were visible on the horses’ backs. The horses had feed available, but no protection from adverse weather.

6. Bouvry’s Prime Feedlot, Granum, AB

Info: This gigantic feedlot is located between Fort Macleod and Granum. Some holding pens are visible from Highway 2. According to the landowner map of Willow Creek, the land parcels belong to Claude Bouvry, not to his company Bouvry Exports.
Observations:

10/18/13
2:15pm: The observation confirmed that there was still no shelter for the horses. Some holding pens appeared very overcrowded.

From a small bridge at the end of the feedlots access road, a few of the front pens were visible. The horses were lined-up at the feed troughs and eating. The Belgian Draft Horses & Percherons observed in these pens were extremely overweight (BCS 8) and likely ready for shipment to the plant.

10/24/13
7:40 am: Overnight, the temperature had dropped to 25°F, but the horses had no protection from the cold. The holding pens were very muddy and covered in manure. In one of the pens, a dead mare and a dead foal were visible. They appeared to have been there for several days, since their bodies had already started decomposing and scavengers had been eating parts of the meat. Bones and intestines were
visible. This discovery proves that Bouvry’s workers do not check the horses’ welfare on a daily basis. These horses should have been detected while still alive and been given veterinary assistance. Their cramped body posture could indicate that they died a slow and painful death.
7. Range Road Feedlots

**Info:** Bouvry Exports Calgary Ltd owns more than 2000 acres around Fort Macleod and Granum. The following two feedlots are located on Bouvry Exports’ land parcels, according to the landowner map of Willow Creek:

**Feedlot on Range Road 264**
2:40 pm: The horses were all Belgian draft horses and Percherons. They were extremely overweight and the feed troughs were full of grain. No hay was visible, although hay should be the basic feed for horses which cannot graze on a pasture, as it provides essential nutrients and keeps the horses busy. Some pens appeared very crowded. The hooves were in a better condition than last year and seemed to have been trimmed recently. There was still no shelter for the horses. The ground was muddy and covered in manure. There were limited amounts of straw in the pens. However, this straw would be soaked in wet weather conditions, leaving the horses with no dry place to rest.

Some horses were lying down lethargically. They did not even lift their heads when other horses walked by, only their breathing indicated that they were still alive. It is important to stress the potential consequences of overfeeding horses, particularly overfeeding grain. Laminitis, an extremely painful hoof disease and other health issues arise from obesity in horses.

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Feedlot on Range Road 253
8:45 am: The temperature was 51°F. The holding pen conditions were still the same as last year. The pens were covered in manure and very muddy. They were partially flooded, likely from clogged up water troughs. Ground that is severely covered with manure and urine, especially in combination with mud, can cause painful infections of the hoof and foot.

The horses still had no shelter. There was a very limited amount of straw in each pen, but not enough for all the horses to lie down. Just like at the other feedlot, all horses were of the same breed and very overweight. The horses’ hooves were neglected and in bad condition. Many horses had overgrown hooves, some with cracks. Several horses had club feet, a condition that requires regular and thorough hoof care. Even unshod horses, foals and older horses, need regular, professional hoof care to prevent misalignments, movement impairments and hoof diseases.
Investigations & Advocacy

**Information about club feet**

Club feet occur in different animals, notably equines. The condition is characterized by a strongly upright pastern. **Careful farrier work on the hooves can lessen the severity of many cases**, and in certain circumstances surgery may be beneficial. The visible outward appearance of a club foot has different possible origins that include a genetic predisposition to the condition, a congenital defect formed while the animal is in the womb or problems with diet and bone development during the early post-natal period. While many young foals are born with somewhat upright pasterns, the condition may resolve naturally or with minimal intervention if begun early. However, some cases are so severe that more drastic treatment may be required. (Wikipedia)

When the investigators left the feedlot, an arriving Bouvry employee in a pick-up truck turned around and chased them down the highway for about 30 miles, in a very threatening manner.

**Feedlot on Range Road 264**

8:40am: The feed troughs observed at the feedlot are not suitable for outdoor use since they have no cover protecting the food from rain or snow. Similar to the other feedlot, the pens were partially flooded from overflowing water troughs. The investigators noticed one horse with an injury above the hoof. With so many horses and very few employees operating these feedlots, such injuries might often remain unnoticed and untreated. Another horse was observed being aggressive and biting others, a behavior animals tend to develop in crowded conditions.
Full feed troughs

Overflowing water trough

Muddy pens

Aggressive horse
8. Pastures for mares & foals

10/18/13 – 6pm
Fort McLeod -Township Road 92 / Highway 3

Next to the slaughter plant holding pens is a large pasture strictly for mares and foals. There are two small sheds on the pasture. Investigators noticed a thin mare which was grazing next to the fence. She had an enormous abscess between her cheekbones, which appeared to be a final stage strangles infection. The abscess was open and pus was dripping from the wound.

Information about strangles:
Strangles is a contagious upper respiratory tract infection of horses caused by a streptococcal bacterium. The disease is spread when the nasal discharge or material from the draining abscess contaminates pastures, barns, feed troughs, stables etc. Clinical signs include fever, heavy nasal discharge, and swollen or enlarged lymph nodes in the neck and throat latch. The disease is very contagious. Precautions to limit the spread of the illness are necessary and those affected are isolated. As with many streptococcal infections, penicillin or penicillin-derivative antibiotics are the most effective treatments. After an abscess has burst, it is very important to keep the wound clean. (Wikipedia)

On the other side of the pasture, where most of the mares and foals were gathered around hay bales, the investigators noticed another mare with an abscess. It is very likely that she was also infected with the disease. Investigators also observed a grey mare that was very thin, hip bones and ribs were clearly visible.
Two days later, investigators noticed another very thin mare. Like all of Bouvry’s horses, she had two identifying brands, a three digit number and the letter “U”. The mare with the potential strangles infection still had not been separated from the herd. Her open abscess apparently had not been treated, which indicates once more that Bouvry’s workers do not check the horses for injuries and diseases on a daily basis.

Range Road 263
Close to the Prime Feedlot is another large pasture with mares and foals. Last year, the investigators filmed the little foals on this pasture in heavy snowfall. To this day, they still have no protection from extreme weather conditions, no dry resting area in case of rain and snow. Several foals had snotty noses and some were observed coughing.
Alberta has a dry continental climate with warm summers and cold winters. The province is open to cold arctic weather systems from the north, which often produce extremely cold conditions in winter. As the fronts between the air masses shift north and south across Alberta, the temperature can change rapidly. Arctic air masses in the winter produce extreme minimum temperatures varying from (−65 °F in northern Alberta to −51 °F in southern Alberta. (Wikipedia)

**Conclusion:**
The investigation revealed that the situation at Bouvry’s collecting station in Montana and the feedlots in Alberta remains unchanged. Thousands of horses are still kept under inhumane conditions to ensure a reliable and steady supply for the Fort MacLeod plant.

**Concerns:**
- Lack of shelter and dry resting area in harsh weather, not even for the foals
- Neglected hooves
- Gross overfeeding, obese and extremely lethargic horses
- Muddy, manure covered pens which are partially flooded
- Crowded conditions, insufficient space for the horses
- Aggressive behaviour, fighting
- Emaciated horses
- No veterinary care, untreated diseases and injuries
- Horses left to die in pen area
- Dead horses left among live horses for days

Observations from this year’s and last year’s investigation suggest that the massive feedlots are operated with only a few workers who focus on ensuring that the feed troughs are never empty. They are not capable of detecting animal welfare problems, diseases and injuries in a timely manner.