

Horse Clinic

an der Rennbahn

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Opinion regarding submitted videos and pictures from:

1. Bouvry Feedlots October 2012

The videos show very large herds of horses kept in feedlots. None of the paddocks or pastures have protection against the elements, such as trees or shrubs or a shed. It is irresponsible to expose the animals to all kinds of weather without giving them the opportunity to either take shelter from the sun or, in particular, from the cold and snow. Horses in the wild would always seek shelter as soon as they get too warm or too cold. Foals, in particular, cannot adapt to extreme temperatures as easily and get cold faster. The body requires a lot of energy to maintain its body temperature, the immune system becomes weak, and as a result, diseases may appear. The video shows a small foal in the snow no longer moving with a tucked-up abdomen and its fur standing up. For one, the foal is freezing, but it also shows a reduced general condition and is obviously suffering. The curved back and tucked-up abdomen are signs of an expression of pain by the foal.

The lying mare with the bleeding teats during delivery tries to birth a foal with a faulty position of the front limbs. This is an incorrect position of the foal in the birthing canal, and a natural birth is impossible in this way. The degree of pain this mare must endure is most comparable to the pain of an acute volvulus and is otherwise unsurpassed by any other disease or injury. In the clinic, we see mares again and again with difficult births, and from this experience, I can say these mares suffer severe pain.

Eventually, this mare will die from exhaustion and pain. It is irresponsible and contrary to any thought of animal welfare to transport such an animal without anesthesia.

To keep and appropriately maintain these animals, several caretakers with appropriate training or at least enough experience with horses would have to check the herds every day. How many helpers it would require is difficult to say and is dependent on the animal fluctuation. I estimate one helper or caretaker can monitor approximately 100 horses per day. If the herd remains the same for a period of time, then the monitoring would, of course, go much faster because one can assume the caretaker would know the horses better and could already target the sick ones. There should also definitely be an option to keep the sick horses separate from the herd. (Regulation of the Law on Animal Welfare)

Horses need a lot of roughage and, unless they are working, actually do not require concentrated feed. Their digestive system and entire metabolism are geared toward raw fiber digestion. Shifting the amount of raw fiber ration to concentrated feed can lead to metabolic disease, which in turn can lead to secondary diseases such as laminitis or colic. It is not clear what is being fed to the horses

in the feedlots, but in my opinion it most likely is corn silage. Corn silage is a starch, and therefore, high energy feed with little raw fiber and much lactose and protein. It is absolutely fine to use this in horse feeding; however, it should only be rationed as concentrated feed and by no means as "ad-libitum feeding." Although the horses in the videos look highly overweight, they do not appear sick. Lying and sleeping horses in the midst of a herd are quite normal. Such behavior can also be observed frequently in paddocks or in modern active stables. On the other hand, based on the weight of the animals, it would not come as a surprise if one or another is lying down because its legs are hurting.

2. Horse Transports in Argentina/ Horse Transports from the USA to Mexico

In the pictures and videos about horse transports in Argentina, the poor nutritional and health status are particularly noticeable. The animals are underweight with a few exceptions and old festering wounds on the legs, torso, penis or eyes appear completely untended to. At a collection site in New Mexico, the videos show animals trying to stand up in agony in the paddocks, but they cannot get up anymore out of weakness. Abrasions and bedsores on the entire body are an indication that these horses have not just been lying recently. It is absolutely unjustifiable to keep horses without weather protection in enclosures with barbed wired fencing or to transport them on trucks without cover. The pictures show completely soaked, freezing horses being exposed to the wind.

In addition, the videos show images in which horses are lying in the transporter and being trampled by the others. Horses are flight animals, and therefore, such situations cause panic for the animals and further worsens the entire situation. When such an "accident" occurs, the horses have to be unloaded immediately to restore calm and ensure the lying horses are not being injured or even killed. With animal welfare oriented management of animal transports, to include the separation of horses into smaller groups with adequate room and a suitable means of transportation, such accidents can and must be avoided. The European Law for the Transportation of Animals stipulates exactly how animals must be transported and that they must be given water and food every eight hours and so on.

Furthermore, it is also not acceptable to herd the animals with sharp objects, and it is certainly not acceptable to have dogs chasing them and digging their teeth into the horses' hind legs. One can certainly affirm the filmed transports not only did not comply with the Law on Animal Welfare, but it is also clear the animals were tortured to an extent one can hardly imagine in our present day.

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