

## Animals' Angels Report on Horsemeat Imported to Europe

### Introduction

*Animals' Angels Inc.* and our European Ally *Tierschutzbund-Zürich (TSB)* have gathered extensive information about the horse slaughter industry. The evidence obtained proves that horse meat imported from Canada, Argentina and Mexico and sold in Switzerland was produced in violation of EU as well as Swiss animal protection laws.

Through our investigations conducted in 2012, we are able to prove that labels on the packaged meat contain false information and that the horses opposite to the claims of importers and distributors are not slaughtered according to EU and Swiss standards. Swiss importers claim that they ensure that the production conditions comply with EU animal welfare standards. In reality, however, they have no influence on the production itself.

The Product Manager of *Spar/TopCC* admits: "Compared to the international horse meat trade, Switzerland is not a large importer. That is why nothing is changed regarding transport and conditions."

### The Investigation

Switzerland imports 5,000 tons of horse meat annually, due to the fact that only 8% of the Swiss demand can be covered by local supply. The vast majority of the meat comes from Canada, Mexico and Argentina. All US horse slaughter plants ceased operations in 2007. However, during our investigation we still found labels stating the US as location of slaughter.

*GVFI International*, located in Basel, is the largest horse meat importer in Switzerland. They import approx. 2,500 tons of horse meat annually, which is then distributed to retailers and butcher shops. According to their website, animal welfare is one of their main concerns. In a letter to our team *GVFI* states that the legal requirement in the production countries match EU requirements. Additionally, many of their retailers also claim that transport & slaughter in Mexico, Canada and Argentina complies with EU & Swiss animal welfare standards. **However, reality is different.**

#### a) Transport



*Mexican transport trailer without roof*

While it is true that all the slaughter plants are required to have EU certification, the same cannot be said transport. EU regulation 1/2005 does not apply on transports in non EU countries and the animal welfare laws in the production countries do not offer comparable protection for the horses.

More than 60% of the horses slaughtered in Canada & Mexico are of US origin. Many of these horses face transport times of 28 hours or more. In Canada, horses can legally be transported without food and water for 36 hours. In addition, the transport trailers are very different

from EU approved trailers. They do not provide single stalls and the animals have no access to water en route. Usually, only two dividers segregate the horses on the trailer, which creates a hazardous situation if a horse goes down during transit. Hundreds of documents obtained from the USDA by Animals' Angels show that horses being trampled to death in a crowded trailer is not a rare occurrence. Some of the trailers do not have a roof and provide no protection from the elements. None of the trailers have a ventilation system, required in the EU for all long distance transports.

US Transport Companies are required to fill out transport documents ( Owner/Shipper Papers) prior to loading, stating when and where the horses were loaded, how many horses were loaded and that the horses were fit for transport. However, our investigation has shown that many of these documents were falsified or filled out incorrectly.

### **b) Conditions at Feedlots and Collecting Stations**



*Dying horse at Dennis Chavez feedlot NM*

Prior to transport to the plants, horses are gathered in large collecting stations or feedlots. Bouvry Exports, Canada's largest horse slaughter plant, operates numerous feedlots in close proximity to the plant to ensure a steady supply. Thousands of horses are kept inside these vast feedlots at any given time without protection from the elements and with limited space to move around.

Mares with young foals are kept on pastures with no shelter from the harsh Canadian winter weather. It is next to impossible to ensure appropriate veterinary care for such a large number of animals. Our investigation documented many horses with severely neglected hooves

as well as sick and dying horses. Even direr is the situation for horses exported to Mexico, since the conditions at export pens and feedlots in Texas and New Mexico are especially deplorable. Horses are often kept in barren dry lots without shelter from the desert sun and without sufficient access to food and water. Sick and injured horses are often denied veterinary care and are left to die a slow and cruel death in the pens.

### **c) Slaughter Plants**

EU certification of the slaughter plants strives to ensure compliance with EU standards regarding slaughter, food safety, hygiene, animal welfare and animal health.



However, documentation obtained from two of the Canadian horse slaughter plants shows that even this certification is no guarantee for humane treatment. The horrific video evidence obtained by the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition shows ineffective stunning with horses being shot multiple times. Despite this evidence, both slaughter plants continue to export to Europe and Switzerland, where the meat is sold by large scale grocery chains such as *Migros*.

Documentation obtained from Mexican and Argentinian slaughter plants shows horses in severe distress and without sufficient access to food, shelter and water.

#### **d) Drug Residues**

Horses have been a part of the American culture for a very long time and are not raised with the intention to be used in food production. Therefore substances, prohibited by the European Union, are commonly administered to US horses. US veterinarians have warned about the contamination of American horse meat for years. Substances banned from food production range from wormers to Phenylbutazone (PBZ or “bute”), the “aspirin” of the horse world, and even include fertility drugs that can cause miscarriages in women. The widely used Phenylbutazone is a known carcinogen and can induce blood dyscrasias, including aplastic anemia, leucopenia, agranulocytosis and death. (Source: US Food and Drug Administration) The label on each bottle of Phenylbutazone reads: “Not for use in horses intended for food.”

The EU Food & Veterinary Office (FVO) addressed the drug residue issue in their latest inspection report<sup>1</sup> from their visit at horse slaughter plants in Mexico: “The systems in place for identification, the food chain information and in particular the affidavits concerning the non-treatment for six months with certain medical substances, both for the horses imported from the US as well as for the Mexican horses are insufficient to guarantee that standards equivalent to those provided for by EU legislation are applied.”

The previous horse owners sign these sworn affidavits, declaring that their horse had not been given any drugs for the last six months. However, there is no US agency checking if these affidavits are true.

There have been several incidents recently where random samples of horse meat imported into the EU tested positive for drug residues. The latest FVO report from Mexico actually confirms that the Mexican horse meat does not comply with EU standards. In the European Union, all horses have to have an “Equine Passport” that lists all the medicine the horse has been administered in his life.

Our investigations in Canada, Mexico and the United States have shown that the horse slaughter industry not only violates Swiss and EU animal protection laws, but also is non-compliant with the *OIG Terrestrial Code*<sup>2</sup>, which is the basis for the current EU animal welfare policy and internationally recognized standard:

1. *Freedom from hunger or thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour*
2. *Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area*
3. *Freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment*
4. *Freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind*
5. *Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering*

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep\\_details\\_en.cfm?rep\\_id=2958](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2958)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&httmfile=chapitre\\_1.7.1.htm](http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&httmfile=chapitre_1.7.1.htm)



**The Request**

Animals' Angels Inc. joins TSB's request to immediately stop the import of horse meat produced in the US, Canada, Mexico and Argentina. The production conditions in these countries do not comply with EU and Swiss animal welfare standards and also pose an imminent health risk for the consumers due to the possibility of drug residues.

Based on the current control mechanisms, it is impossible to reliably trace the horse from horse owner to the slaughter plant. Insufficient controls, falsified export documents and cruel treatment of slaughter horses call for **a complete halt of all horse meat imports from these countries to Switzerland and the European Union.**

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**Sonja Meadows**

**President  
Animals' Angels Inc.**