Animals’ Angels Report on horsemeat imported to Europe

Part 2: Investigation of feedlots, export pens, transport and slaughter plants in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Argentina

1.1 Canada

In 2012, close to 100,000 horses were slaughtered in Canada for human consumption. More than 50% of them (56,415) were of US origin. Four of the existing horse slaughter plants are certified to export meat to the European Union. Two of them, Bouvry Exports Ltd. in Alberta and Viandes Richelieu in Québec export meat to Switzerland. Bouvry Exports Ltd. also operates massive feedlots in close proximity to the plant to provide a steady supply of horses.

Our investigators visited Alberta in October of 2012 and documented conditions at these feedlots and the slaughter plant as well as during transport. All observations were documented in hundreds of photographs and hours of video footage. The following account is a summary of the most important findings, the full length investigative report can be found here:


Summary of Investigation:

- The Bouvry Exports Calgary LTD horse slaughter plant is located near Fort Macleod, a small town in Alberta. Bouvry Exports owns about 2000 acres of land around Fort Macleod, where they fatten US and Canadian horses in large feedlots. The majority of these horses appear to be Belgium draft horses & Percherons. Boury also leases property at the Peigan Indian Reservation near Summerview, where they keep up to 4500 horses.

- Feedlot conditions are poor. Horses have no shelter from sun and snow. Horses are in barren pens with feed troughs that are kept full all day long. Most of the horses observed had a body condition score of 7-8. Some horses are so overweight that they spend much time lying down. It is important to stress the potential consequences of over feeding horses, particularly overfeeding grain. Laminitis, an extremely painful hoof disease and other health issues can arise from obesity in horses.
• Some of the feedlot pens were very crowded. Investigators observed aggressive horses biting others, a behaviour some animals develop in crowded conditions.

Horses fighting in crowded feedlot pen  
Crowded feedlot pens with no shelter

• Bouvry Exports also maintains vast pastures with mares & foals, which could be an indication that they are breeding their own horses to accommodate the European demands regarding drug residues. The majority of these pastures offer no shelter for the horses and no protection for the foals from extreme weather conditions.

Mares and their foals – no protection from the elements-empty barn on other side of fence

• Bouvry Exports owns thousands of horses at any given day, which makes providing each horse with appropriate care difficult at best. Observations confirm that sick horses in obvious physical distress do not get immediate veterinary help:

Investigators observed a gelding lying flat on the ground. Blood around his anus could be a symptom of colic, which can be fatal when left untreated. Colic is a common result of over consumption of grain. Other horses surrounded him, touching him with their noses, indicating they were aware of his distress. He was able to lift his head, but not to stand up. It is questionable how long it took Bouvry’s workers to detect him, as there were so many horses lying down in the pens.
Investigators also noticed a mare lying on the ground, surrounded by other horses. Blood was steadily dripping from her teats and another horse was licking it. Coming closer, the investigators observed a partially born foal lodged in her birth canal. **The foal was dead.** Instead of emerging the front legs first, the foal’s head had emerged first. The mare appeared very weak and was unable to rise. Since no workers were present to address the situation, investigators called the SPCA in Lethbridge to get help for the suffering mare.

- It was noted that many of the horses inside the feedlots had extremely neglected, overgrown hooves.

- Many horses that are slaughtered at Bouvry Exports are horses that so called “kill buyers” obtain for Bouvry at horse auctions all across Canada and the United States. US horses are gathered at the large “Bar S” feedlot in Shelby, Montana. **Many of the horses already have a long journey behind them when they arrive at the feedlots.** Some of them stay for six months before being shipped to the slaughter plant.

- Hidden camera footage obtained by the **Canadian Horse Defence Coalition** from inside the Bouvry plant as well as the Richelieu plant shows severe violations and horrific conditions. (Improper stunning, kill box not designed for horses, use of electric prods, more than one horse at the time in the kill box, blood covered kill box, slippery flooring, noise)
1.2 USA
Since 2007, all horse slaughter plants in the United States are closed. However, horses continue to be exported to Canada and Mexico to be slaughtered. A large network of so called “kill buyers” buys the horses for the foreign plants at horse auctions across the country. From there, they are first transported to the kill buyer’s collecting station. Once the kill buyer has amassed enough horses to fill a trailer, they are transported to the large feedlots and export pens. Conditions are poor, especially in Texas and New Mexico. Horses are 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.

Many of these horses face transport times of 28 hours or more. 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.

The following account is a summary of the most important findings, the full length investigative reports can be found here:


Summary of Investigation:

a) Dennis Chavez feedlot, Los Lunas, New Mexico

Dennis Chavez is New Mexico’s largest kill buyer. According to USDA owner/shipper paperwork, he ships close to 10,000 horses each year to Mexico for slaughter. Chavez uses the Santa Teresa and the Presidio export pens to ship his horses to the different plants. Chavez is a regular supplier to Mexican plants certified to export meat to the European Union.

Public records also show that Chavez has committed several violations of the Transport to Slaughter Regulations. (Case # NM10031; TX03234; TX06045 et al.) Paperwork proves that Chavez shipped mares with newborn foals on their side to slaughter, as well as horses with broken legs. Aborted foals were also found inside the trailer. (Source: USDA owner/shipper papers 2010)

Prior to shipping to Mexico for slaughter, horses are branded at the feedlot with the Chavez brand.
Observations:

- Multiple horses were found in bad condition (emaciated, untreated wounds, open cuts, lame, strangles, eye injuries).

- One very thin grey has untreated, deep, lacerations to both eyes. He is believed to be blind in his right eye, and has limited vision in his left. He stayed close to a chestnut, which he used as a “seeing” companion. His entire body was covered with marks. Marked with slaughter tag, and large “X”, he could have been one of the many rejects. Even with apparent unkind handling, this horse licked the investigator’s hand.
• One very emaciated, older Thoroughbred (lip tattoo not clear), had teeth so overgrown they protruded from his mouth. It is questionable that he was able to eat at all. He was very weak.

• An aborted foal was seen, along with an extremely thin/emaciated (BCS 1) bay horse barely able to hold itself up.

• 4 horses were down, unable to rise and in obvious distress: A light grey mare was pawing in agony at the ground near water trough. She had dug deep trenches in the ground. She was lifting her head and biting her tongue. A severely emaciated palomino mare and an extremely emaciated light bay/buckskin mare with blaze were lying next to her.
• The fourth horse, a severely emaciated, light grey mare with black spots attempted to get up numerous times, but was falling back to the ground each time, unable to stand. She had an open, bleeding wound on her hip.

b) Presidio Export Pens, Texas

At the Mexican/US border, US slaughter horses have to be unloaded into export pens prior to crossing into Mexico. There, they are checked by Mexican Veterinarians. There are currently 7 different slaughter horse export pens along the southern border, 3 of them are located in the small town of Presidio. (Ruben Brito Pens, C4 Pens, Baeza Cattle Company Pens) All of them export horses to Mexican plants approved by the European Union:
Inter Meats, S.A. DE C.V.
Avenida Universidad 602 Int. 19 Unidad Ganadera
Aguascalientes, AGS. Mexico 20130

Empacadora de Carnes de Fresnillo
Avenida Plateros No. 480
Colonia Centro, C.P. 99040
Fresnillo, Zacatecas

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The worst conditions and treatment can be found at the **C4 pens**. The C4 pens export slaughter horses to the Inter Meats plant. According to numbers provided to the *Texas Department of Environmental Quality (TCEQ)*, they ship approximately 5,475 horses/year.

Inter Meats or “Dallas/Mexico Crown” is linked to the Belgium based company Chevideco, which imports the meat from the Aguacalientes plant to Europe. (www.chevideco.com)

**Observations:**

- Photos provided to Animals’ Angels show that horses were dying in the **C4 pens** without human intervention. In August of 2011, there were approximately 350 horses on the property and photos show several horses down and dying. Many were extremely emaciated (BCS 1) or had open, untreated wounds.

- All horses had no shelter and no protection from the desert sun. Signed eye witness statements claim that horses were being denied food & water. The statement also talks about “non-ambulatory horses laying in puddles of mud and urine” and dying.

- The bodies of many of the horses that died on the property were being dumped in a dry creek bed on an adjacent property.
Several of the trailers documented in Presidio to transport slaughter horses, are unsafe and dangerous for the animals. The truck of kill buyer Dorian Ayache was involved in a tragic accident in January of 2012, when the trailer loaded with 38 horses overturned. 3 horses died. [http://www.wkrn.com/story/16531100/overturned-cattle-truck-closes-both-directions-of-i-40](http://www.wkrn.com/story/16531100/overturned-cattle-truck-closes-both-directions-of-i-40)
Broken & Missing overhead piping put horses at risk of severe injuries and offers no protection from elements.

Other trailers found had completely boarded up sides, making it impossible to check on the condition of the horses.

Additionally, no airflow is possible through the closed trailer sides, which causes increased temperatures inside the trailer – especially when it is parked. Lastly, these trailers have no roofs and offer no protection from the elements.

- Before crossing into Mexico, all trucks have to stop at a broke to have their paperwork checked, which sometimes takes several hours. In the meantime, the horses sit on the trailer. While waiting for the go-ahead, the horses are confined on sealed trailers for hours, which is completely unacceptable. The irritated horses are in direct afternoon sunlight with exterior temperatures averaging 98 degrees in the late summer months. Exterior temperatures combined with overcrowded metal trailers, still air and body heat create dramatically higher interior trailer temperatures. Dehydration and exhaustion are easily reached in environments such as this, and the stress, confinement and discomfort unnecessarily violates the exact regulations set in place to protect the horses.

- All three of the Presidio export pens do not offer shelter for all the horses inside their facility. Temperatures in the hot summer months can be as high as 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

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c) Eagle Pass Export Pens, Texas

The Eagle Pass export pens are operated by the Texas Department of Agriculture. Horses arrive from all across the United States, from locations as far as South Dakota. Horses are exported from here to Mexican slaughter plants approved by the European Union.

Location:
205 Industrial Blvd
Eagle Pass, TX 78852

Observations:

- Investigators documented the conditions inside the TDA export pens and noted that most pens in the back did not have shelter available for the horses.
- The horses were gathered around large round bales of hay and all appeared to be very hungry, as they were vigorously eating the hay from all sides.

Unfortunately, only the dominant horses were able to eat as they guarded the hay and prevented submissive horses from getting close to it. Investigators watched as the less aggressive, but hungry, horses were bitten and kicked as they tried to come near. The horses in the pens were in constant movement, and fighting between horses was continually observed.

- Several horses were very thin, others were seen and heard coughing non-stop, indicating an upper respiratory infection or worse. A few horses were also observed with eye infections, and others were noticeably limping.

- Investigators were able to locate an additional set of slaughter horse pens outside of town. A sign at the gate said “Chula Vista Training Center Live Racing”. Inside these pens, a worker sprayed the horses with a white solution (believed to be for de-ticking) on their bodies and faces; even spraying one horse directly in the eyes. Several of the horses were very thin, and some had freshly stitched wounds. Additional pens were seen closer to the race track, and one horse observed appeared dead.
Investigators followed a truck with a trailer full of horses from the Chula Vista pens and noticed a **downed horse being trampled at the rear of the fully packed trailer**. They pulled up next to the passenger of the truck and told him that a horse was down. The driver pulled the truck over and investigators informed them that the horse needed to be offloaded immediately. As the truck was pulled over and motionless, the downed horse was able to rise in the trailer.

Several of the transport trailers observed were in poor condition. Two of the trailers observed were not suitable to transport animals at all, since they did not provide adequate ventilation and airflow.

Inside other trailers broken and protruding piping was documented. Holes in trailer sides and dividers/doors not extending all the way to the trailer floor create additional hazards, such as broken legs and other horrific injuries.
Hole in trailer side – horses’ legs can get stuck

- Trailers are overloaded, and horses do not have adequate space.
- While waiting to cross the border, the horses are confined on sealed trailers for over three hours, which is completely unacceptable. The irritated horses are in direct afternoon sunlight with exterior temperatures averaging 98 degrees in the late summer months. On this particular day, the temperature was 92 degrees. Exterior temperatures combined with overcrowded metal trailers, still air and body heat create dramatically higher interior trailer temperatures. Dehydration and exhaustion are easily reached in environments such as this.
- One of the drivers was observed using a sharp metal-ended poker, stabbing the horses inside the trailer with full force. Investigators immediately ran to the trailer and saw that two horses were down and struggling. Investigators began documenting the violent distress of both horses attempting to rise without sufficient room to do so.

Each time one of the horses tried to rise, they forced the standing horses around them to rear up inside the trailer to find footing. Due to the lack of available space, the horses standing over the downed horses had no choice but to step on, and crush them. Fresh injuries and blood were visible on both the downed and standing horses. The desperate struggle lasted for several minutes with one horse finally getting up. Unfortunately, the second horse quit trying and laid quietly as other horses continued to stand on him.
Investigators attempted to communicate with the drivers, none of whom spoke English which is a DOT violation. Investigators called Eagle Pass police in order gain translation to instruct the driver to return to the export pens to get the downed horse off the trailer. Within moments, all 8 trucks left the dry lot and the investigators followed believing that the horse would be offloaded at the export pens as requested. To the investigators’ surprise, the trucks instead drove straight to the border crossing just one short mile away. Defiantly, the driver fled across the border, knowing that he would be out of reach.

1.3 Mexico

The United States is the main supplier for horses slaughtered at EU approved plants in Mexico. Between January 1, 2012 and October 27, 2012 approximately 89,032 horses were exported from the US to Mexico for slaughter. (Source: USDA Market News Service). There are currently four plants certified to export horse meat to the EU:

**Inter Meats, S.A. DE C.V.**  
Avenida Universidad 602 Int. 19 Unidad Ganadera  
Aguascalientes, AGS. Mexico 20130
The following account is a summary of the most important findings, the full length investigative reports can be found here: [http://www.animalsangels.org/the-issues/horse-slaughter/eu-consumer-awareness-campaign.html](http://www.animalsangels.org/the-issues/horse-slaughter/eu-consumer-awareness-campaign.html)

**Summary of Investigation:**

- Transport trailers observed were not appropriate to transport horses. There were 7-8 horses per compartment, segregated by metal dividers. The trailers have no roofs and absolutely no protection from the elements. Other trailers found had completely boarded up sides, making it impossible to check on the condition of the horses. Additionally, no airflow is possible through the closed trailer sides, which causes increased temperatures inside the trailer – especially when it is parked.

- Investigators followed a truck loaded with horses to the Aguascalientes plant. Transport time from the US border was **16 hours**. The horses were not given food or water during the entire transport. The trucks backed up to the loading ramp and the seal was checked by plant personnel. (Seal is attached at the time of loading at the US export pens) Earlier that night, the drivers had told the investigators that they are not allowed to break this seal, even if there was an emergency such as a horse going down inside the trailer.
Several horses were observed limping when they walked down the ramp. Some of the horses were very thin, many had snotty noses and eyes that appeared infected. Thoroughbreds were noted amongst them as well as several horses displaying the BLM freeze brand. The horses were put in a large pen without access to food and water.

Other examples of origin/shipment info for US horses arriving at this plant (Source USDA/Sagarpa):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner/Shipper:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Distance to export pen:</th>
<th>Distance export pen to plant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Kunz</td>
<td>Willard, Utah</td>
<td>1166 miles</td>
<td>660 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorian Ayache</td>
<td>Lebanon, TN</td>
<td>1268 miles</td>
<td>660 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Simon</td>
<td>Perkins, OK</td>
<td>729 miles</td>
<td>660 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple Crown Ranch</td>
<td>Meeker, OK</td>
<td>711 miles</td>
<td>660 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike McBarron</td>
<td>Kaufman, TX</td>
<td>606 miles</td>
<td>660 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryon Simon</td>
<td>Cannon Falls, MN</td>
<td>1445 miles</td>
<td>660 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Quinn</td>
<td>Gallop, NM</td>
<td>635 miles</td>
<td>660 miles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to paperwork obtained by Animals’ Angels, these horses came from Triple Crown Ranch in Meeker, OK. 31 horses were unloaded from the first trailer, 27 horses from the second trailer. Nothing on the owner/shipper paperwork indicates that any BLM branded horses were among the ones loaded, despite the fact the shipper is required to enter this information on the owner/shipper certificate. Additionally, the information regarding sex, breed and age of the horses in different Triple Crown Ranch shipments is identical on multiple owner/shipper certificates, which proves that the paperwork has been falsified.

Investigators then continued to the Camargo plant. Upon arrival, they immediately noticed a death pit on one side of the property. Several horses had been dumped there and left uncovered for the vultures to eat. They were in various stages of decomposition. No bullet holes were visible. Horse parts and bones were scattered throughout the area, likely dragged away from the pit by scavengers.
A small truck loaded with carcass parts left the plant and was observed loading them into a bigger truck down the road at an empty building. After the exchange, both trucks returned to the plant. It is unclear why they did not load on the slaughter plant premises.

The holding area is quite substantial with numerous pens and concrete feed troughs along its side. Not all of the pens provide shelter from the desert sun. Several horses inside the holding pens were very thin. Investigators observed the horses being fed hay one time during their observation, however, the feed troughs were often documented empty. Several pens did not have access to water at all times.

Many had large red, three digit numbers or letters painted on them. Lots of USDA slaughter tags were visible. In one of the pens, investigators found a downer horse. He did not move even when it was approached by the
investigators, his mouth was open and only shallow breathing was visible. Investigators did not see any plant workers check on the horse.

All pens close to the plant have slippery, concrete flooring with no bedding and several horses were observed sliding and falling down with full force.

At the plant entrance, the horses had to pass through a shower that rinsed them off before they entered the plant. Several of the horses were terrified.
One stunning black horse with a white blaze panicked and tried to jump the concrete wall. Workers hit him and forced him to back down, but he injured himself in the process and obtained a bleeding injury on his face.

1.4. Argentina

Argentina is the largest horse meat exporter worldwide. Argentina does not raise horses for slaughter, therefore all horses slaughtered are former work-, pleasure- or performance horses. Similar to the United States, slaughter buyer obtain these horses at auctions or farms across the country and then ship them to the plant. Since Argentina does not have a microchip system in place, horse theft is a huge problem.

Argentinian laws dealing with the transport of farm animals do not offer much protection. Horses can legally be transported for 36 hours without access to food or water.

Currently six horse slaughter plants are approved to export horse meat to the European Union. Two of them, Lamar and Indio Pampa, both located close to Buenos Aires, supply horse meat to Switzerland. The animal welfare organization GAIA conducted an investigation at these plants in 2010. They documented horrific abuse and extremely long transport routes. As a result, Equinox, one of the largest European horse meat importers, initiated a certification by the independent auditor SGS. According to SGS, both plants were inspected and protocols to ensure compliance with European regulations were created.

In October of 2012, our team conducted an investigation at these plants to check if conditions had improved since 2010.

The following account is a summary of the most important findings, the full length investigative reports can be found here:


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Summary of Investigation:

- At a collecting station in La Banda, **several horses are emaciated and one is limping**. A bay horse has an **infected, swollen eye** with severe fly infestation. Two horses have **open, untreated wounds** on their hind legs and their legs are swollen significantly. Despite their condition, all these horses were loaded onto the trailer.

- Investigators do not see **any water** inside the pen area. There is also **no shelter, with temperatures over 100° Fahrenheit** in summer. A little tree offers some shade, but there is not enough space for all 35 horses. They are fed with straw.

- The handling of the horses is very rough. The workers **strike the horses with wooden sticks**. A German shepherd **dog is used to round them up** and is observed biting their back legs. The animals are **nervous and some appear to be very frightened**. The workers continue to hit the horses once they are on the trailer. Loading is chaotic.
- The trailers observed are inadequate for horse transport. The trailers have no roofs and offer no protection from the elements. Wooden trailer sides were missing boards, high risk for injuries.

- Trailers were extremely overcrowded, horses had no room to move around. High risk of horses being trampled to death, when going down.
After the loading was finished, investigators trailed the truck to the Lamar plant. The journey took **18 hours and 5 minutes**. During the transport no rest stops were made for the horses and at no time were they offered feed or water. At times, there was hard rain and no provisions were made to protect the horses from the adverse weather.

Once the horses were unloaded into the pens area at the Lamar plant, one horse was observed **falling** twice on the slippery concrete flooring. According to a worker present at unloading, this happens on a regular basis and often the horses break their legs and cannot walk again.
Inside the Lamar pen area, the front pens are overcrowded. Investigators do not see any feed or water. The horses appear hungry and many are searching the ground for something to eat. Some horses are very thin and their rips clearly visible. Several are limping. There is no protection from the sun and the rain. A few foals were observed among the horses. One horse is dead.

Conclusion:

The investigations revealed that the conditions for “slaughter” horses in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Argentina are poor and well below European standard.