Investigation of Horse Transport & Slaughter Plants in Argentina

Introduction:

The investigation was part of our on-going EU consumer awareness campaign. Argentina is the biggest exporter of horse meat in the world.

The horse slaughter plants Lamar and Indio Pampa, located in the Buenos Aires area are both approved by the EU to export meat into the European Union. The meat is shipped to Europe by plane by the Belgium company Equinox, one of Europe’s largest horse meat importers. Equinox is the owner or co-owner of Lamar and Indio Pampa and distributor of the brand LAMAR®.

Equinox also imports meat from the Viande Richelieu plant in Canada as well as the Empacadora de Carnes de Fresnillo plant in Mexico.

Homepage:
http://www.equinox.be/

Statements made on homepage:

- “Equinox obtains the meat from the source, in the meat country par excellence: Argentina. The horses run around freely and graze on the vast Argentinean pampas. The growth process of many years takes place in the pure countryside, and that ultimately yields high-quality meat.”

- “Equinox, with the best abattoirs in the horse countries par excellence, watches over the quality of the meat from the source onwards.”

In 2010, the Belgian animal welfare organization GAIA investigated the Lamar and the Indio Pampa plant and documented horrible conditions. Among other concerns, it was revealed that transport distances to the Lamar plant are up to 1500 miles long. The following images of GAIA’s film “From horse to plate” were released in 2011.

© Copyright Animals’ Angels Inc.
Reacting to the allegations, Equinox ordered the inspection company SGS\(^1\) to audit the slaughter plants and set up a protocol for animal welfare during equine transport. According to SGS, the protocol which was used at the slaughter plants was customized by SGS for the client and ensures compliance with Argentinean and EU legislation.

Our team send investigators to Argentina to check if transport conditions have improved since 2010 and are now in full compliance with EU regulations. Furthermore, the goal was to document if the two Argentinean horse slaughter plants really satisfy the requirements of Council Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing, which all EU approved plants have to comply with.

**Observations:**

**1) Slaughterhouse Lamar, Province of Buenos Aires**

**Address:**
Frigorífico Lamar SA  
Mercedes, Buenos Aires

**Owner:**
It is unknown if the Argentinean Veronesi family or the Belgian importer Equinox own the three slaughter plants Lamar, Indio Pampa and Entre Rios. However, they work together very closely.

5:30am: The investigators arrive at the plant in Mercedes. Next to the building, there are two unloading ramps visible. The **front pens are overcrowded**. The pens in the back are bigger and the horses have more space to move around. No **food or water** is observed. The horses appear hungry and many are searching the ground for something to eat. Some horses are very thin and their ribs are clearly visible. Several are limping. There is **no shelter and no protection from the elements**. Some foals are visible among the horses. One horse appears dead.

The **ground is covered in manure**. When it rains, the pens get muddy, which can result in painful hoof infections. At 6:00am, the workers notice the **dead horse**. They load the carcass onto a small trailer and haul it away. Shortly thereafter, a Veronesi transport truck arrives and unloads horses. The workers use sticks with white flags to move the horses through a long aisle to the holding pens.

---

\(^1\) SGS (Société Générale de Surveillance) is the world’s leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company.  
© Copyright Animals’ Angels Inc.
At 7:45 am, the investigators leave the slaughter plant to meet a horse trader, who buys horses for Lamar and has been in the business for over 40 years. He gives them some useful information about Lamar and the trade with slaughter horses in Argentina. According to the trader, Lamar was closed down for three days, because the plant was deemed unsanitary. An inspector of SENASA\(^2\) had visited the slaughter plant and decided that it had to be shut down for cleaning before slaughter could be resumed. He also stated that Lamar currently was paying 5 Pesos/kg and that the horses lose approx. 6 % of their body weight during a 300 mile transport. The longer the transport, the more weight the horses lose, since they are neither fed nor watered during the entire trip.

He also claims that horses without documents simply had to be vaccinated in order to get a veterinarian to issue papers for them. The trade with stolen horses is common in Argentina.

He shares that the Lamar plant has increased their security since 2010 and that drivers are not allowed to enter the pen area or the plant itself. After unloading the horses, they have to leave the premises immediately. Lamar pays a security service for the surveillance of the premises.

2) Visit of kill buyer property, Salades, Province of Corrientes

At 1:45 pm, the investigators meet another kill buyer in Salades. Argentinian kill buyers, who supply horses straight to the plants, are called “Acopiodores”. They buy horses from local horse dealers and gather them at their collecting stations, which is called “Acpio”. When they have enough horses to fill a trailer (approx. 35), the animals are transported to the plant.

Talking to the “Acopiodor” of Salades, the investigators learn a lot about the trade with stolen horses. Apparently veterinarians and police do not check the paperwork required by SENASA diligently enough. While there are regulations in place to prevent the trade with stolen horses, the system does not work properly and the illegal trade with stolen horses is booming. He claims that a lot of veterinarians and policemen, responsible for the verification of the documents, are corrupt and paid by the kill buyers. He states that it would be very easy to get papers for stolen horses. Horses are currently not micro-chipped in Argentina, but it will probably be enacted soon because of the EU.

He has leased approx. 300 acres of land for his collecting station, where he can keep up to 250 horses. He

\(^2\) Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria

© Copyright Animals’ Angels Inc.
explains that such a collecting station would be necessary to “clean” the horses and resolve paperwork problems. He supplies horses to several slaughter plants in Córdoba and Buenos Aires, among them Lamar. The trip to the Lamar plant takes approx. 15 hours.

At 4:50pm, the investigators visit another horse dealer nearby, who is going to deliver some horses to the collecting station of the “Acopiodor” in Salades the next morning. He tells us that he never transports horses directly to the slaughter plants, only to the collecting stations. He arranges the trade between the “Acopiodor” and the owners of the horses and collects a fee for this service. The original owner tells him where the horses are located and he organizes the pickup. He brags that he gathers approx. 50 horses a week.

3) Horse Collecting Station, Pirané, Province of Corrientes

Investigators visit one of the many horse collecting stations. The horses seem to be in good condition, but there is no protection from the elements. Next to the pen, investigators notice a loading ramp and an empty trailer.

The open trailers are common in Argentina for horse transport. The floor is covered by a metal grid. Argentinean transport regulations require:

Art.4 a) The floor has to be made of metal or a similar smooth material and be covered by a rigid grid so that the animals do not slip.

---

3 Resolución 97/1999, Registro Nacional de Medios de Transporte de Animales

© Copyright Animals’ Angels Inc.
At 1:00pm, the owner arrives. He claims that the horses were not intended for slaughter, but used for rodeos. He says rodeos are very popular in this region.

Heading back to Corrientes, investigators see a dead mare lying next to the road. Someone had tied her hind legs so that she couldn’t run away. Taking a closer look at the back of the mare, investigators notice the head of a foal protruding, apparently both of them died during birth.

Dead mare discarded along road  
Tied up hind legs

4) Visit of kill buyer premises, La Banda, Santiago del Estero

In La Banda, a small town near Santiago del Estero, investigators meet with another kill buyer who sells horses to the Lamar slaughter plant. The distance to Lamar is 618 miles. The “Acopiodor” shows the investigators 35 horses which are going to be loaded the next day. He states that the transport to Lamar takes approx. 20 hours.

A lot of horses are very thin, with ribs and hip bones clearly visible. Two horses have big open wounds on their hind legs and would be considered unfit for transport according to EU legislation.4

No water is visible in the pen area. The horses have very limited protection from the elements. A small tree offers some shade, but there is not enough space for all 35 horses.

---

4 According to Paragraph 2 (b) of Chapter 1 of Annex 1 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport

© Copyright Animals’ Angels Inc.
5) Trailing of slaughter horse transport from La Banda to the Lamar slaughter plant

Two days later, investigators observe the workers rounding up the horses which are bound for slaughter. All of them have ear tags and some horses have been branded with the letter “F” for “Frigorífico” (slaughter plant). Investigators observe three mules amongst the slaughter horses.

According to EU legislation, they have to be transported separately[^5]. Several horses are emaciated and one is limping. A bay horse has an inflamed and swollen eye, infested with flies. The two horses with the open wounds on their hind legs are also loaded. Apparently, their injuries have not been treated since the investigator’s last visit two days ago. The wounds are very swollen and bloody discharge is dripping from one of the wounds.


© Copyright Animals’ Angels Inc.
The handling of the horses is very rough. The workers hit the horses with wooden sticks. A German shepherd dog is used to round up the horses and bites their hind legs. The animals are nervous and some appear to be very frightened. The workers continue to hit the horses even inside the trailer, in order to make them move from one compartment to the other.
At 5:00pm, all 35 horses are loaded. The transport consists of a truck with 2 trailers. Both trailers are severely overloaded. If a horse falls down, it’s at high risk of not being able to stand up again and being trampled. There is no water system and no bedding. The wooden trailer sides have large holes which also creates the risk of injury for the horses.
The kill buyer states that he is currently shipping two loads of slaughter horses per week. Furthermore, he explains that according to Argentinian law, the police is required to be present during loading to check the papers of the horses and prevent stolen horses from being sold for slaughter. However, that never happens.

Someone, who appears to be a veterinarian, arrives and checks the paperwork of the horses. However, he does not monitor the loading of the horses and does not check if the animals are fit for transport. On the paperwork the investigators notice the seal of the police and SENASA.

At 5:10pm, the loaded truck leaves the premises and starts heading towards Mercedes. The temperature is 96.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

Distance from La Banda to Mercedes – 618 Miles

At 2:30am, the truck drives through a thunderstorm with heavy rainfall. Within minutes, the horses inside the open roof trailer are completely soaked. The temperature has dropped to 62 degrees Fahrenheit.

No protection from elements

At 11:10am, the truck arrives at the Lamar slaughter plant in Mercedes. The transport took 18 hours. In Argentina, animals only have to be watered and fed after 36 hours of transport. Along the way, the driver made five short stops to check if all the horses were still standing.

© Copyright Animals’ Angels Inc.
Shortly after their arrival at the slaughter plant, the horses are unloaded. A plant employee monitors the unloading. The horses appear weakened after 18 hours of transport. Investigators note a grey horse with a fresh injury on its front leg. The lame horse observed earlier is limping worse than before. An emaciated grey horse appears very weak and has difficulties remaining on its feet. It appears to be in strong pain and moves down the ramp very slowly and cautiously.
The flooring of the unloading area is very slippery. A bay horse slips and falls to the ground with split legs. It struggles to get up, but slips and falls again. After a few more attempts, it manages to get back up. An employee confides that it happens quite frequently that horses fall down and break a leg.

Bay horse falling multiple times

The driver tells the investigators that he is relieved that all 35 horses survived the transport. He admits that recently four horses died during transport, they fell down and were trampled by the others. That is why he now checks more frequently during transport if all horses are still standing. According to the driver, it happens often that horses go down during transport. Some itineraries are worse than others. The route from La Banda to Mercedes is rather flat and therefore not so exhausting for the horses. When there are hills and turns in the road, there are more problems, he explains. The road conditions in Argentina can be very difficult. He says many times he has picked up horses as far north as the border to Bolivia.

Lately, horses would arrive more often injured at the plant. He thinks this is due to the fact that many animals are delivered to the collecting stations from far away and are already exhausted when they get there. If the animals came directly from the pasture, reasonably fed and rested, there would be less problems.

A foal was born during his last transport to the plant. He gave the foal to a friend, who had lactating mares, and the mother was slaughtered. When being asked if stolen horses are sent to slaughter he replies that this happens all the time. Animals are often “relabeled” at the collecting stations, they arrive with one document and are shipped with another document. This creates no problems for him, he says, because by the time he loads the animals they all have the required paperwork. He has never had problems with the documentation he carried along.

A slaughter plant employee tells the investigators that the horses usually stay eight days in the lairage area before being slaughtered. However, the demand for horse meat is very strong at the moment and the horses are often slaughtered without delay. Currently, 131 to 137 horses are slaughtered per day, 143 at the most. The plant is capable of slaughtering up to 300 animals daily. The employee also states that there has been a change of ownership at the plant.

Investigators are told that the consumption of horse meat is not permitted in Argentina. Horse meat is nonetheless put into circulation, but it is sold as beef.
Conclusion:

The EU certification of slaughter plants in third countries implies that the plants meet the EU requirements regarding animal welfare, food hygiene and animal health. However, our observations show that the Lamar slaughter plant does not comply with many requirements of Council Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter.

The EU Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport does not apply outside the EU. Our footage proves that the transport conditions in Argentina have not improved since 2010 and by far do not meet EU standards. The national animal transport rules do not offer the horses adequate protection and are not sufficiently enforced by the local authorities. We have documented multiple violations of Argentinean law:

- Art. 17. The loading has to be conducted with utmost caution, without causing suffering to the animals. The personnel which is responsible for the handling of the animals has to ensure calm all the time, act without harshness and avoid excessive noise as well as yelling or beating in order to prevent stress, injuries, aggressiveness and fighting between the animals.

- Art. 18. No animals may be transported resp. moved, which cannot stand on their feet and which are obviously sick, injured or exhausted.

- Art. 4 g) The vehicles must have a protective roof resp. an appropriate cover in case it is necessary to protect the animals against bad weather conditions.

- Art.19. No animals may be transported under very bad weather conditions, but should it be absolutely necessary, in that case they have to be sufficiently protected against cold, heat or rain.

- Art.15. The number of animals, the respective animal species, groups, divisions or live weight, that may be loaded on different means of transport and must be transported under the best possible conditions, must be closely related to the space available in the vehicle. The vehicle must not be overloaded with animals.

Additional concerns:

- No veterinarian checks before loading if the horses are fit for transport.

- In Argentina, the illegal trade with stolen horses is a very lucrative business. The horses do not have to be microchipped like in Europe. According to horse dealers, it is easy to get papers for stolen horses. On the accompanying documents, there are stamps of the police and SENASA.