The slaughter of American horses in Mexico for human consumption in the European Union

Areas of Concern

1) Animal Welfare at the plants

Example: Carnicos de Jerez S.A.

Carretera a Jerez KM. 27.5
Jerez, CP 99380
Zacatecas, Mexico
Phone: 494-94-54046

Animals’ Angels visited the plant three times over the last two years. The following is a summary of the observations made during these visits.

Additional Information:
The United States is the main supplier for horses slaughtered at the EU approved plants in Mexico. Between January 2009 and October 1, 2009 approximately 34,422 horses were exported from the US to Mexico for slaughter. (Source: USDA Market News Service)

A) Poor condition of horses observed in the holding pens
The vast majority of the horses in the pens on all three visits were of US origin (green USDA slaughter tag attached) and many were in extremely emaciated condition.

These findings are consistent with observation made by Food and Veterinary Office inspectors during their September 2008 visit of the plant.
According to the inspection report, “most of the horses seen were emaciated and an abnormal death rate (10-20 per month, 1.5% of incoming animals) of horses during their stay in the lairage was noted”.

Especially the horses of US origin appeared to be weakened to the point they could no longer stand. During each visit, we observed horses lying flat on the ground, barely breathing.

At no point did these horses receive veterinary care or were administered food or water. Several of the horses were limping or showed fresh injuries, most likely obtained during the long distance transport from the US.

Bro​ke​n front leg  
Eye injury
Again, at no point was any veterinary care provided to these horses.

**B) Plant accepts delivery of pregnant mares from the United States.**
We observed foetal sacks lying in the pen area as well as mares with their newborn foals. The plant should not accept horses in this condition from its US supplier.

**C) Poor welfare conditions in the pen area**
Water troughs in the pen area, while available, were observed empty on numerous occasions. Feed supplied to horses is of low quality. No shelter is available for the majority of the horses.
D) Cruel and inhumane treatment of horses
Plant employees were observed moving a downed horse from the pen area to the plant entrance with a trolley. Workers then used a cable winch to pull the downed horse into the plant. The metal cable was tied around one of the hind legs and the horse was dragged over the concrete edge of a raised platform into the plant. The same horrible procedure was observed later that day again, when a brown mare arrived down at the plant.

Inside the plant, a brown horse was observed being left in the blood smeared kill box, while the workers were taking their 45 minute lunch break. The horse was kicking and appeared extremely terrified.
2) Animal welfare during transport to the plant

Horses from the United States are shipped to Mexico via four export pens located in New Mexico and Texas. The distance between the export pens and the plants in the Zacatecas area is more than 800 miles (approx. 1,333 km).

For this long distance transport, inhumane open deck cattle trailer are used to transport the horses. These trailers offer no protection from the elements and the horses constantly hit their heads on the low metal pipes that run across the trailer. Numerous horses were observed getting stucked in between the pipes on a crowded trailer and panicking, which puts all horses at risk of severe injuries.

**The plants should not accept shipments of horses arriving in this kind of trailer.**

**Conclusion:**

Council Directive 2002/99/EC states that third countries importing meat into the European Union have to comply with Community Legislation. Specifically, animal welfare requirements at slaughter
must be met in accordance with Council Directive 93/119/EC. Our observations clearly demonstrate that the Jerez plant has **violated this Directive on numerous occasions**:

- **Article 3**
  Animals shall be spared any **avoidable excitement, pain or suffering** during movement, lairaging, restraint, stunning, slaughter or killing.

- **Article 12**
  Injured or diseased animals must be slaughtered or killed **on the spot**

**ANNEX A: REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MOVEMENT AND LAIRAGING OF ANIMALS IN SLAUGHTERHOUSES**

- **6.** Without prejudice to the provisions laid down in Chapter VI of Annex I to Directive 64/433/EEC, animals which **have experienced pain or suffering during transport or upon arrival** at the slaughterhouse, and unweaned animals, must be slaughtered immediately. If this is not possible, they must be separated and slaughtered as soon as possible and at least within the following two hours. Animals which are unable to walk must **not be dragged to the place of slaughter, but must be killed where they lie** or, where it is possible and does not entail any unnecessary suffering, transported on a trolley or movable platform to the place of emergency slaughter.

- **4.** Animals must not be struck on, nor shall pressure be applied to, **any particularly sensitive part of the body**. In particular, animals' tails must not be crushed, twisted or broken and their eyes must not be grasped. Blows and kicks must not be inflicted.

- **5.** Animals must not be taken to the place of slaughter unless they can be slaughtered immediately. If they are not slaughtered immediately on arrival they must be lairaged.

- **9.** Animals which are not taken directly upon arrival to the place of slaughter must have **drinking water available to them** from appropriate facilities at all times. Animals which have not been slaughtered within 12 hours of their arrival must be fed, and must subsequently be given moderate amounts of food at appropriate intervals.

**2) Residues in meat of horses from the United States**

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 Community, 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)

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The label on each bottle of Phenylbutazone reads: “Not for use in horses intended for food”

The Deputy Director General of the Directorate Generale for Health and Consumer Protection Paola Testori Coggi requested in his letter dated April 17, 2009 that “the competent authority of the third country should be able to guarantee, at least for a period of not less than six month prior to slaughter….., that the required withdrawal periods for veterinary medicinal products…..have been respected. Furthermore, he demanded that the third countries intending to export meat to the Community should submit an action plan to the FVO by July 17,2009.

The questions remaining are:

- Has Mexico submitted such an action plan in time? What does this plan say about how Mexico is going to implement the requested measures?

- Specifically, how is Mexico going to be able to guarantee a six month withdrawal period, given that the majority of the horses slaughtered are coming from the US? A “sworn statement” of the US supplier is certainly not enough.

- How will the Commission control the effectiveness of the implemented measures?

- How will the Commission eliminate any risk for the European public? Will each carcass be tested upon arrival at the European Union?