Investigation of the Horse Slaughter Trade in Argentina

2014 Report

On-site investigation: August / September 2013

1. Background

The horse slaughter plant Lamar, which is EU approved, is located in the province of Buenos Aires. In 2011, the Belgian horse meat importer Equinox paid the certification company SGS to assess the Lamar plant regarding animal welfare during transport. The certificate states: “Lamar S.A. has been assessed and certified as meeting the requirements of Protocol for Animal Welfare in Equine Transport (2011) for the following activities: Load, transport and unloading of equines for slaughtering”

In October 2012, Animals’ Angels and its Swiss Ally TSB sent a team to Argentina to check if transport conditions really are adequate and if horse slaughter plants comply with EU requirements. The investigators trailed a transport of horses to Lamar for over 18 hours, during which the horses did not get any water, feed or rest. During loading at the collecting station, the horses were beaten with sticks on their heads and bitten by dogs. Injured and sick animals did not receive any veterinary care and were also shipped. Inside the open-roof trailer, the horses were exposed to sun and heavy rain. The unloading area at the Lamar plant was very slippery and one horse fell twice. The horses appeared exhausted from the long transport. The pens did not offer them any protection from adverse weather conditions and no food was visible. The investigators found a dead horse which had died overnight without any veterinary assistance. New evidence obtained in 2013 shows that animal welfare during transport and at the plant remains poor.
2. Stolen horse recovery at the Lamar plant, February 2013

In February 2013, a considerable number of **stolen horses were recovered from the Lamar holding pens**. On the weekend of February 23rd-24th, the first stolen horses were discovered in the slaughterhouse pens. The news spread quickly. The following Monday, many horse owners gathered at the gates of the slaughter plant, but the guards would not let them in. On this day, 100 to 150 horses were slaughtered. The next day, an Argentinean animal-welfare organization intervened and managed to stop the slaughter process for 24 hours. The owners were allowed to enter the pens and look for their horses. In the pen of Lamar’s main supplier Raul Onorato, 15 of the 30 horses inside the pen had been stolen from their legitimate owners. However, it is likely that the real number is even higher, since many horses came from far away and not all owners were able to get to the plant within such short notice or did not even hear about the opportunity to check if their stolen horses were at this plant. (Argentinean newspaper article: [http://elnuevocronista.com.ar/ciudad/la-ciudad/policiales/9247-hallan-animales-robados-en-frigor%C3%ADfico.html](http://elnuevocronista.com.ar/ciudad/la-ciudad/policiales/9247-hallan-animales-robados-en-frigor%C3%ADfico.html))

Evidence obtained at Lamar in February 2013 shows that animal welfare had not improved. There was still **no shelter** for the horses. The pens were **muddy and covered in manure**. There was no dry and clean resting place for the horses. Many of the horses were in deplorable condition, but did **not get any veterinary care**. Several horses had horrible **head injuries**, which had probably occurred during transport. Argentinean trailers are designed for cows and inappropriate for the transport of horses. The dividers placed between the compartments are much too low for horses, who hit their heads on the dividers when they are rushed from one compartment to the other. There were also several **pregnant mares** in Lamar’s holding pens. Many horses were **emaciated** and looked very weak. A stallion had a **wire tied around his mouth**, probably so that he could not bite other horses.

![Emaciated horses in muddy pen](image1)

![Stallion with wire around his mouth](image2)
Some horses were **injured so badly** that they should **never have been transported** (large, open wounds, broken leg, overgrown and inflamed hoof). At the very least, these horses should have been **euthanized** immediately after their arrival at the plant to avoid further suffering. One horse was lying in the pen **dying**, another was already **dead**.
One horse was found dying in a holding pen on the 24th February. Two days later, it was found dead lying next to the holding pen. No bullet hole was visible on his forehead, which means that the horse was left to die a slow and painful death instead of being euthanized.
3. On-site investigation, August/September 2013

8/14/13 – Purchase of Phenylbutazone

Phenylbutazone is commonly administered to horses as an anti-inflammatory drug for the short-term treatment of pain and fever. Phenylbutazone is not permitted to be used in the EU in animals intended for the food chain. No Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) has been set for phenylbutazone residues, meaning that any detection in animals used for human consumption is considered a violation. In the EU, phenylbutazone is available only with prescription and has to be administered by a veterinarian. Treatment with phenylbutazone must be recorded in the “equine passport”, resulting in the definitive exclusion of the horse from slaughter for human consumption. The investigators went to an animal pharmacy and bought phenylbutazone and a syringe without prescription and without any questions asked. However, the label of the medicine stated “venta bajo receta” (available only with prescription) and that the drug is destined for sports horses and must not be administered to horses whose final purpose could be for human consumption.

Talking to veterinarians as polo horse owners and breeders, the investigators learned later that phenylbutazone is commonly used to treat race and polo horses. When they no longer perform, they are sold to the kill buyers. Furthermore, Argentinean newspapers reported multiple times about stolen sport horses found at Lamar and other slaughter plants. Footage and photos obtained at Lamar in February 2013 confirm this. Some horses had several brands, others had scars indicating that their original brand had been removed.
8/16/13 Lamar Slaughter Plant, Mercedes, Province of Buenos Aires

Address:
Frigorífico Lamar  
Ruta 5 km 93  
Mercedes, Buenos Aires

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

Manager: Eduardo Guzman

Observations:
Investigators arrived at the Lamar plant in Mercedes at 4:00pm. A small group of horses was visible at the far end of the holding pens, too far away to assess their condition. However, the investigators noticed a very pregnant mare that should not have been transported. She was searching the ground for food. Another group of horses was just being unloaded and rushed into the pens. Two of them were severely limping. There was still no protection from the elements and no food or water was visible.

8/29/14
The investigators arrived at the plant at 12:15pm. There were no horses visible in the holding pens, they probably had all been slaughtered that morning. The investigators observed the plant for several hours, but no trucks with horses arrived. The investigators returned to the plant at 11:20pm. A truck with horses had just arrived and was being unloaded. The horses were moved into small pens in a covered lairage area. There, they were hosed down with water. The water jet was very strong and often aimed at the horses’ faces. Additionally, the workers were hitting the horses with full force with long sticks.
The pens in the lairage area were overcrowded. The horses were very agitated and there was a lot of fighting. Many horses were observed biting and kicking others. The flooring was very slippery, all the more because it was wet. Several horses slipped and fell as they tried to escape the aggressive horses.

At 12:20am, another truck arrived with horses and backed up to the unloading ramp. Half an hour later, the unloading was finished. Again, the horses were hosed down, which caused a lot of agitation. At 01:30am, everything was quiet and the horses had calmed down. The safety measures seemed to be extremely high. Even at night workers were present and flood lights lightened the lairage area.

When the investigators returned to the plant the next morning at 10:30am, all horses were gone. They had been slaughtered early in the morning.

8/30/13 General Pico horse slaughter plant, Rio Cuarto, Province of Cordoba

Address:
Frigorifico General Pico SA (former Aimar)
Ruta 8 597

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Head office: Ave. del Libertad 14220, Martinez, Buenos Aires  
Owners: Ernesto Löwenstein, Alan Löwenstein, Enry Guido  
Observations:  
The investigators arrived at the slaughter plant in Rio Cuarto at 6:45pm. A high fence covered with a green tarp surrounded the holding pens. The pens had shelter and the water troughs were full, however no food was visible.

Fence around holding pens  
Sheltered pen area

Next to the slaughterhouse pens, there was a large field with more horses. These horses also wore ear tags, a sign that they belonged to the plant. There were several big hay bales in the field and all horses appeared to be in good health.

Investigators returned to the plant on Monday morning at 7:30am to meet with the plant manager. They were told that the plant was previously called Aimar and that the name change occurred 18 months ago. The head office is now in Buenos Aires. The manager explained that they slaughter 100 to 150 horses a day. The horses are slaughtered 1-3 days after their arrival at the plant. The meat is exported to Europe, the plant is EU certified and inspected by the EU every year. The investigators were not allowed to see the inside of the plant or the holding pens.

9/3/13 – Slaughter horse collecting station near San Rafael, Province of Mendoza

At 1:00pm, investigators visited a collecting station for slaughter horses, a so-called “acopio”, located north of San Rafael. There were approx. 15 horses, slated to be sent to slaughter the following week. The horse dealer explained that he only shipped to the Pico plant in Rio Cuarto, that the transport time is 7 ½ hours and that he delivers approx. 150 horses per month. He stated that March/April would be the best time to buy horses, since this is when they are brought down from the Andes where they have been on pasture for the summer.

The collecting station consisted of just one large pen with a wooden loading ramp. Despite the fact that temperatures in summer months can reach 100 degrees Fahrenheit, there was no shelter. The horses had water and hay, however, the hay was of very poor quality.
The horses seemed to be in good physical condition, with one exception. One horse had an **open head injury**, which had probably occurred during transport. The cut was so deep the bone was visible. It was obvious that the wound had **not been treated**.

9/5/13 – **Slaughter horse collecting station near Ravalle, Province of Santiago del Estero**

At 11:40am, the investigators visited a collecting station for slaughter horses near Ravalle. The horse dealer said he **shipped to the General Pico plant** in Rio Cuarto. There were only 10 horses and hinnies in the pens, all appeared to be in good condition. The horses all displayed the same **freeze brand**, probably the one of the horse dealer. Some horses had **ear tags**, which meant they were destined for slaughter. The animals did **not have any shelter** from sun and rain. They had water available, but the **feeding troughs were empty**.
Meeting with horse dealer near Santiago del Estero

At 2:00pm, the investigators met up with horse dealer Pedro at a service station near Santiago del Estero. The investigators had visited his collecting station in La Banda the year before and had trailed a transport to the Lamar plant for **18 hours**. The conditions at his collecting station were disastrous: no shelter, no water, only straw to eat, emaciated and injured horses, no veterinary care, use of dogs to round up the horses and beatings with wooden sticks. The dealer was **still sending horses to Lamar**. He seemed to be suspicious and did not take the investigators to his collecting station. Nevertheless, he was willing to talk to them.

Pedro said he had been dealing with slaughter horses for ten years, mainly shipping horses to the General Pico and Lamar plant. He ships **70 – 100 horses per week** to slaughter, approx. **38 horses per truckload**. Pedro gets horses from the regions of Santiago, Tucuman and Salta. It is **621 miles to Lamar and 434 miles to the Rio Cuarto plant from his collecting station**. The slaughter plants pay **2.25 Pesos (0.27 USD)** per pound of live horse. He complained that this was a low price and that the market had been better four years ago.

Pedro confirmed that the horses do **not get any water or food during transport**. He said that drivers are not allowed by SENASA\(^1\) to enter the trailer. They have to go straight to the plant and the trailer has to remain

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\(^1\) Veterinary authority (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria)
sealed until arrival at the final destination.

9/6/13
At a service station near Rosario, the investigators saw a horse transporter drive by. This tractor/trailer combination is a typical Argentinean animal transport. The open trailers do not offer the horses any protection from sun and rain. Both trailers appeared overcrowded, putting the horses at high risk of being trampled to death.

9/13/13 – Lamar Slaughter Plant, Mercedes, Province of Buenos Aires
Slaughter started early in the morning. The pens in the lairage area were full of horses. At the entrance to the kill floor, a downer horse was lying on the concrete floor. He was moving his legs and lifting his head, but was unable to rise. A plant employee explained that he had gone down during transport. Instead of being euthanized immediately after arrival, he was left unattended without any veterinary help.

The horses that were to be slaughtered next were in a small pen in front of the chute leading to the kill box. A worker was hitting and poking the horses with a long stick to force them into the chute. The horses were very agitated. The floor in this pen was slippery; one horse fell while being poked with the stick.
The horses inside the chute were separated in groups by several metal dividers, which were observed slamming down on the horses’ backs. Some horses had fresh cuts on their faces and around the eyes. Several horses were very thin. It was extremely loud in this area. The horses were nervous and frightened, moving their ears quickly. Some were trembling, some stumbled and some opened their eyes so wide that the white was visible.

On the ceiling, a wire was running all along the chute, connected to two electric prods. The electric prods were used to move the horses forward and workers were observed using them on the horses’ heads. One worker was observed hitting the horses with an iron stick, the others all used the electric prods.

The horse next in line to the kill box was able to see the horse in the kill box being stunned, as the divider was not high enough to block the view. A captive bolt was used to stun the horses. The horses in the kill box were moving their heads to escape the captive bolt and were not restrained in any way. The stunning was done very sloppy. The worker operating the captive bolt seemed to be under time pressure and did not take enough time to ensure proper stunning. The shot frequently hit the horses’ heads from above or from a
lateral angle. One horse was still standing after the first shot and had to be shot twice. There was a lot of blood inside the kill box. The horses were not always hoisted right away to be bled out after coming out of the kill box. It happened several times that another horse fell out of the kill box while the precedent horse was still lying there. Several of the horses were showing substantial movements while hanging from the chain hoist. They repeatedly stretched out all four legs and slackened again.

In a pen in the lairage area, there was a horse with an open wound at the fetlock of the left hind leg and a smaller injury on the right front knee. The injuries looked fresh and had likely occurred during transport. The horse was not able to put weight on the left hind leg. It was observed slipping on the wet and manure-covered concrete floor. Most of the horses were in the lairage area next to the plant. However, there were two groups of horses in two large pens in the rear of the plant. A long water trough was filled with dirty water, but no food was noticeable. The pen floor was very muddy. One horse was severely limping. In one corner of the pen, trash and some horse bones and a skull were visible.
Eduardo Guzman, the plant manager, mentioned that the horses that were slaughtered that morning came from the **north of Cordoba** and **Santiago del Estero**. In his office, there was a map on the wall showing the suppliers and their collecting stations. It proved that the horses come from all over Argentina. The plant claims that the maximum transport distance to the plant is 370 miles. However, out of the 32 collecting stations depicted, 50% are more than 370 miles away, 7 of them are in fact over 620 miles away.
4. Violations of EU animal welfare requirements at the Lamar plant

Slaughter plants in third countries exporting meat to the EU have to comply with minimum standards regarding animal welfare, as required in EU Council Regulation No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing\(^2\). Article 12 of Chapter II states:

**Imports from third countries**

*The requirements laid down in Chapters II and III of this Regulation shall apply for the purposes of Article 12(2)(a) of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004.*  
*The health certificate accompanying meat imported from third countries shall be supplemented by an attestation certifying that requirements at least equivalent to those laid down in Chapters II and III of this Regulation have been met.*

Evidence obtained at the Lamar plant in 2013 shows that the plant does **not comply with many requirements of Chapter II and III of Council Regulation No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing:**

- **Chapter II, Article 3.1.** Animals shall **be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering** during their killing and related operations.
  - **Observations:** spraying strong water jet pointed at horses’ faces, no euthanasia, use of electric prods, stun failure (horse still standing after first shot), beating & hitting of horses

- **Chapter II, Article 3.2** For the purposes of paragraph 1, business operators shall, in particular, take the necessary measures to ensure that animals: (a) are provided with **physical comfort and protection**, in particular by **being kept clean** in adequate thermal conditions and **prevented from falling or slipping**;
  - **Observations:** no shelter from sun and rain, no clean and dry resting place, muddy and manure covered floors in outdoor pens, slippery concrete floor in lairage area

- **Chapter II, Article 3.2** For the purposes of paragraph 1, business operators shall, in particular, take the necessary measures to ensure that animals: (d) do **not show signs of avoidable pain or fear** or exhibit abnormal behaviour;
  - **Observations:** injured and dying horses left in holding pens in obvious distress, no veterinary care or euthanasia, horses in chute and kill box showing strong signs of fear, first horse in stunning chute able to see the horse in the kill box

- Chapter II, Article 4.1. The methods referred to in Annex I which do not result in instantaneous death (hereinafter referred to as simple stunning) shall be followed as quickly as possible by a procedure ensuring death such as bleeding, pithing, electrocution or prolonged exposure to anoxia.
  ➢ Observations: no immediate hoisting and bleeding

- Chapter II, Article 7.1. Killing and related operations shall only be carried out by persons with the appropriate level of competence to do so without causing the animals any avoidable pain, distress or suffering.
  ➢ Observations: employees appear to be untrained & violent (spraying water at horses’ faces, yelling, hitting, electric prodding), inaccurate stunning

- Annex II, Article 1.3. Lairage facilities shall be designed and constructed so as to minimise the risk of injuries to the animals and the occurrence of sudden noises.
  ➢ Observations: horses slip and fall on the wet and slippery concrete floor

- Annex II, Article 2.3. The water supply system in pens shall be designed, constructed and maintained so as to allow all animals at all times access to clean water without being injured or limited in their movements.
  ➢ Observations: not all pens offer water, some water troughs dirty and full of algae

- Annex II, Article 2.5. Floors shall be built and maintained in such a way as to minimise the risk of animals slipping, falling or injuring their feet.
  ➢ Observations: slippery floor in lairage area and in pen leading to stunning chute, several horses observed slipping and falling on the wet and manure-covered concrete floor

- Annex II, Article 2.6. Where slaughterhouses have field lairages without natural shelter or shade, appropriate protection from adverse weather conditions shall be provided. In the absence of such protection, these lairages shall not be used under adverse weather conditions.
  ➢ Observations: no trees or shelter in outdoor pens and no protection from sun and rain, pens being used in adverse weather conditions, also when muddy and partially flooded from heavy rain

- Chapter III, Article 15.1. Business operators shall ensure that the operational rules for slaughterhouses set out in Annex III are complied with.

- Annex III, Article 1.1. The welfare conditions of each consignment of animals shall be systematically assessed by the animal welfare officer or a person reporting directly to the animal welfare officer upon arrival in order to identify the priorities, in particular by determining which animals have specific welfare needs and the corresponding measures to be taken.
  ➢ Observations: severely injured and dying horses in holding pens which should have been euthanized immediately after arrival, downer left unattended
- Annex III, Article 1.2. Animals which have not been slaughtered within 12 hours of their arrival shall be fed, and subsequently given moderate amounts of food at appropriate intervals. In such cases, the animals shall be provided an appropriate amount of bedding or equivalent material which guarantees a level of comfort appropriate to the species and the number of animals concerned. This material shall guarantee an efficient drainage or ensure adequate absorption of urine and faeces.

- Observations: horses standing and lying in muddy and manure-covered pens for at least one day (24 hours stop of slaughter process on 2/26/13), most of the pens do not offer any straw for the horses to lie down.

- Annex III, Article 1.8. It shall be prohibited to: (a) strike or kick the animals;

- Observations: employees observed hitting and poking the animals with sticks at several occasions.

- Annex III, Article 1.9. The use of instruments which administer electric shocks shall be avoided as far as possible. In any case, such instruments shall only be used for adult bovine animals and adult pigs which refuse to move, and only when they have room ahead of them in which to move. The shocks shall last no longer than one second, be adequately spaced and shall only be applied to the muscles of the hindquarters. Shocks shall not be used repeatedly if the animal fails to respond.

- Observations: use of electric prods although prohibited on horses, electric shocks administered to the same horses several times, also applied to their heads.

- Annex III, Article 1.11. Animals which are unable to walk shall not be dragged to the place of slaughter, but shall be killed where they lie.

- Observations: downer left unattended in front of the slaughter plant, several downers left to die in the holding pens.

- Annex III, Article 2.4. Every day that the slaughterhouse operates, before any animal arrives, isolation pens for animals that require specific care shall be prepared and kept ready for immediate use.

- Observations: Severely injured and dying horses in the same pen with other horses, no care administered to horses in need.

- Annex III, Article 2.5. The condition and state of health of the animals in a lairage shall be regularly inspected by the animal welfare officer or a person having appropriate competence.

- Observations: horses’ health condition not inspected on a daily basis (one horse found dying in a holding pen on 2/24 - two days later, found dead lying next to the holding pen, no bullet hole visible).
5. Conclusion

Slaughter horses in Argentina are not treated according to EU standards, neither during transport nor at the slaughter plant. The main animal welfare concerns are:

- Trailers inappropriate for the transport of horses (no roof, no individual stalls, no water system) are widely used
- Brutal handling at time of loading (use of dogs, excessive hitting)
- Transports of more than 18 hours/620 miles without feed, water and rest
- Lack of shelter at Lamar and thus no protection from sun and rain
- Muddy pens which are partly flooded and full of manure
- Emaciated, sick, injured, dying horses and pregnant mares in Lamar’s holding pens
- No veterinary care, serious injuries are left untreated
- No emergency killing, horses are left to die
- Many violations at Lamar against EU Regulation 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing (no emergency killing, use of electric prods, slippery floor, ...)

In addition to serious animal-welfare concerns, there is also the risk of drug residues in horse meat from Argentina. Phenylbutazone can be bought without a veterinary prescription. Furthermore, it has to be assumed that Argentinean horse meat comes in a large part from stolen horses. Traceability cannot be guaranteed.