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Implications of Anti-Horse Slaughter in the United States

Horse slaughter, or harvesting, has received mounting attention in recent years, with an ostensible peak now, as bans and orders of cessation are expiring and bills are being signed which permit the practice. There are arguments for and against legalizing horse slaughter, with passionate members on each side of the debate. The fact is, that regardless of personal feelings concerning this matter, consequences exist with the cessation or dissolution of this practice. To better understand and draw conclusions on what this issue means for the United States from an objective, economic stand point, the history and facts about horse slaughter must be reviewed. Some in the horse industry are understandably pleased with the recent development; however, as a positive side exists, so must a negative. Animal rights groups and some horse owners have furiously contested this movement in the market for horses. With the background of a logical and economic orientation, people question the consequences for the horse industry in the United States.

Horses are very significant in the United States, because they are valued as iconic animals. According to Rene (2011), horses are a cherished symbol of the West, and they are kept by many as beloved pets and family members and celebrated in literature, TV and movies. Almost everyone associates with horses, whether it is a pony ride as a child or watching old classic movies. Horses are not only popular in media, but also in huge industries in the United States. Through horse racing, rodeos, horse shows, or pleasure, horses have created an industry

that is prominent throughout the country. Horses have played a large role in American culture and the slaughter of them would contradict that culture. However, despite initial reservations, many Americans may agree that the slaughter of horses is better than alternatives. According to Julliand (2016), it is legal to slaughter horses in the United States, but since the inspectors do not get paid, the meat is not allowed for sale. Therefore, slaughterhouses slaughter the horses for free.

In the United States there are two ways that horses are turned into meat. One is for horses to be euthanized by a veterinarian, or die of natural causes; after which the owner can arrange for the carcass to be rendered into animal feed. The second way horses are turned into food is the typical slaughterhouse procedure. Euthanasia is a humane method of ending an animal's life. Horse slaughter is far from humane – it is a terrible and painful death. These horses are transported for long periods of time without food, water, or rest. In addition, while being slaughtered, horses endure a very painful and frightening process. According to Burghart (2009), animals on the way to slaughterhouses are herded into a “kill chute”, where they are stunned with a blast of carbon dioxide into their brains, and then slit in the throat. This slaughter process is far from euthanasia, because it is extremely gruesome and inhumane. According to Burghart (2009), these horses are bought at auctions or privately from the owner for as much as \$1000.

According to Brown (2012), for as long as there has been horse slaughterhouses in the United States, there has been an issue of controversy. Currently, only three slaughterhouses that produce horse meat intended for human consumption exist in the United States, two of them in Texas and one in Illinois. Two companies, Beltex and Dallas Crown are foreign-owned and employ only a few Americans. They were closed in February when the 5th District Court ruled

that a 1949 law against selling horse meat was valid. These plants have been shut down and reopened a number of times due to changes in laws throughout the years. The last remaining plant, Cavel International in DeKalb, Illinois, was closed in mid-September of the same year under a new state law making horse slaughter illegal. According to Gay (2012), animal rights activists, as well as locals in the communities were trying to prevent the factories from operating, because these foreign-owned slaughterhouses killed and processed more than 90,000 horses for human consumption.

Even though there are state laws to stop slaughtering horses, it is still a major problem in parts of the country. According to Maxwell (2012), the Texas Humane Legislation Network has been recently leading the attack on multimillion dollar companies, utilizing a law from 1949 that prohibits possession, sale or shipment of horse meat intended for human consumption. Both companies have filed lawsuits in retaliation, because they believe the slaughter of horses eases financial strain, feeds other nations, and is accomplished in a humane manner. According to Maxwell (2012), the president-elect of the American Association of Equine Practitioners, Dr. Tom Lenz, who has witnessed slaughters at Beltex, claimed that the industry kills horses humanely. Either way, according to Shlatcher (2002), slaughterhouses are now subject to periodic inspections by the European Union Officials, as well as undergo federal inspection.

According to Brown (2012), in spite of all of the benefits and assurances, animal rights activists and the general public do not support the slaughter of horses. Many feel that there are other alternatives to having to kill the horses for food; that the killing is inhumane and immoral. Activists and equestrians offer many alternatives to slaughtering horses such as placing older or