



Black Beauty Betrayed: Horse Slaughter in Canada



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Most Canadians are not aware of it, but Canada is becoming the horse slaughter capital of the world. There are currently 6 dedicated horse slaughter plants in Canada with more in the works.

The meat from these slaughterhouses is sold as a delicacy in Belgium, France and Japan. What consumers in these countries do not realize is most of the horses they are consuming were once someone's beloved pet, prize-winning race horses (the famous race horse Ferdinand ended up on someone's plate) or working horses. The meat they believe to be a healthy delicacy is laced with a veritable pharmacy of drugs, including dewormers, antibiotics, analgesics and even drugs banned for use in meat animals as they've been proven carcinogenic, such as phenylbutazone.

The road to slaughter for a horse may begin innocently enough. A child's discarded pet; an elderly mare seen as no longer breed-worthy; an indiscriminantly produced quarterhorse or a no-longer prize-winning race horse all end up at livestock auctions across the US and Canada where they will be bought by "kill buyers" - men who buy for Canadian horse slaughterhouses.

The horses, in varying body condition, from young and healthy to badly injured, diseased or blind, are loaded onto double-decker trailers which do not allow them to stand fully, causing repeated head trauma from the protruding metal ceiling, will not have their metal shoes pulled to reduce the trauma to the others of a kick, yet will be loaded with many other horses they do not know.



They will travel many hours, and if originating in the US will cross the border – in the middle of the night while no Canadian Food Inspection Agency or United States Department of Agriculture inspectors are present to check on their welfare as required by the US Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter Act. They will arrive at Canadian slaughterhouses in the dead of the night, when again, no CFIA inspector is present to ensure the injured and dying are not dragged off illegally.

Hidden camera footage obtained by the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition and exposed by CBC National's documentary "No Country for Horses" (http://www.cbc.ca/national/blog/special_feature/no_country_for_horses/no_country_for_horses.html) provided a glimpse into one such facility: Natural Valley Farms in Neudorf, Saskatchewan (similar footage has been obtained at Richelieu in Massueville, Quebec as well). It shows the horses packed into waiting pens with no food or water, clearly terrorized.

The slaughter footage captured the next day showed horses tormented in the stun box, repeatedly beaten with prods, then inaccurately stunned by the captive bolt pistol operator at rates of 30%. These horses showed signs of returning consciousness such as blinking,

gasping and in one case, even attempting to sit up. Regardless, all were strung up and stabbed in only one carotid artery (proper exanguination not ensured).

Many of the bleed-outs were botched with horses falling from the live-suspension lines or left on the floor for upwards of 3 minutes. This meant the horses were not rendered unconscious as they should have been. These horses were then re-hung and pushed to the hock-cutter where their feet were cut off.

Evidence was also obtained that the facility was transporting pregnant mares too close to term and butchering young foals. An interview with one of the managers of the facility recently exposed that foals were a common occurrence.



The facility was also responsible for severe violations of environmental regulations and was documented dumping tanker trucks full of raw horse blood into the Qu'Appelle River (which supplies drinking water to numerous towns and cities in Saskatchewan and Manitoba) and leaving massive piles of rotting horse heads, limbs and internal organs in the Qu'Appelle Valley.



While all of this shocking evidence was provided to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the RCMP, the facility was allowed to continue operating for nearly a year.

Finally, in February 2009, the facility was closed citing food safety concerns. However, 6 other horse slaughterhouses continue operating in Canada.



Horse with cancer eye Horse with facial tumours
Documented in holding pens at Natural Valley Farms

Horse slaughter – whether regulated more carefully or not – simply cannot be done humanely. Horses are head-shy with long, muscular necks making restraint of their heads for an accurate hit all but impossible. Dr. Nick Dodman, animal behaviorist at Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine described the difficulty of accurately hitting a horse's brain as “like trying to hit something the size of an orange in something the size of a suitcase”. Also, as clearly documented, the road to slaughter is a long, dangerous journey as improper conveyances are used leading to horrible deaths from kicking, trampling and head trauma. The dead-on-arrival rate for horses is incredibly high. Is this a fitting end for an animal that once had a loving, cooperative relationship with humans?

Please help end horse slaughter in Canada. To learn more go to <http://www.defendhorsescanada.org>.



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