

To Slaughter or not to slaughter

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To slaughter or not to slaughter is the question, but is it that simple? On the surface what self respecting horse person would want to slaughter horses for human consumption? But, unfortunately, that is not the real question or problem that must be addressed. The problem is the unwanted horse, horses that are infirm, have lost their usefulness or have sustained an injury that prevents them from being ridden, or simply the horse that an owner can no longer care for. Owning a horse is not only a huge responsibility but it is also a substantial expense. Estimates suggest that there are 80,000-100,000 unwanted horses that are sent to slaughter each year. The purpose of this paper is to provide the facts concerning this issue so you can come to your own conclusions.

What horses are going to slaughter? Horses sent to slaughter are a small cross section of the horses in America. There is no one breed or type over represented. Some websites and anti-slaughter advocates suggest that different types of horses are over represented due to their use. However, close scrutiny of the types of horses that are sent to slaughter show this to be untrue.

Is the slaughter process cruel? There are laws already in existence requiring that horses be shipped in a humane manner. These same laws require that the methods used at slaughter plants are humane. The American Veterinary Medical Association through research has determined there are 3 humane methods of euthanizing a horse, a barbiturate overdose, bullet to the brain, or captive bolt to the brain. The captive bolt is the method employed for slaughter. So is slaughter cruel? No, it is not the end I want for my horses but it is not cruel. Another thing to think very seriously about is if slaughter is cruel to horses, then it is cruel to cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens, etc.

If we are not going to slaughter these horses, what are we going to do with them? Frankly, there are not enough retirement facilities to house all these unwanted horses. The average capacity of a horse adoption facility in the U.S. is 30 animals. This means in the first year alone, the U.S. would need an additional 2,700 adoption facilities, according to the American Association of Equine Practitioners. It is estimated that to care for these horses will cost about \$1900 per year per horse or \$115 million to \$130 million depending on the number of horses. There are simply too many unwanted horses to adopt out. Currently, the BLM program for "wild horse adoption" can find homes for only 5000 per year. There are horses currently standing in BLM collection facilities for over a year waiting adoption. 70,000 more horses would simply overload the system.

Why not just euthanize them all? Then what do you do with the remains? Burial is a possibility but no one knows what the environmental impact of the barbituates from 70,000 euthanized horses would be on ground water. If the horses were burned, how much more carbon would be added to the atmosphere and contribute to global warming? The untold consequences of the anti-slaughter bill may cause even worse problems than we have at present.

What about the horse? If an owner has no alternative, one worry is that the horses may be simply turned loose to fend for themselves. There certainly have been unconfirmed rumors to this effect. So what happens to the horse that is released into the

wild? Considering the domestication of the horse and their complete dependency on human caretakers slow starvation would be their end. Which is more humane, a quick painless death or slow one?

It has been suggested that we should stop breeding so many horses. A good idea, however, who is supposed to stop their breeding programs? Breeders I know attempt to produce outstanding horses in their disciplines, which discipline should stop breeding? Should the government control equestrian breeding programs by mandating how we utilize and develop the horse or should this be an industry issue?

As we look at an overview of the issue we see it is much more than “to slaughter or not to slaughter”. It is the unwanted horse that is the problem. A coalition of the horse industry has come together to try and work on the issue. The **Unwanted Horse Coalition** is a broad alliance of equine organizations that have joined together under the American Horse Council. The mission of the **Unwanted Horse Coalition** is to reduce the number of unwanted horses and to improve their welfare through education and the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety, and responsible care and disposition of these horses. The goal is that through education we can eliminate the unwanted horse within the next 10-15 years. By eliminating the unwanted horse, there is no need for slaughter. But by passing legislation that does not address the real problems we can only endanger the welfare of the horse.

As a horse enthusiast, contact the Unwanted Horse Coalition and see what you can do to help the real problem, www.unwantedhorsecoalition.org.