



Horse Slaughter Shutdown Rumors Mixed Up

Horses are still being slaughtered at two processing plants in the United States as of March 1, 2007.

That is in conflict with rumors that have been circulating around the country for the past six weeks.

Gossip ranged from claims that horse slaughter has been completely stopped in the United States, to other stories that both Texas horse processing plants were shut down, but an Illinois plant remained in production.

"It is true that horses are not being processed for

human consumption at either Texas facility as they had been earlier. However, one Texas operation is still slaughtering horses for zoo meat," according to Jim Bradshaw, lobbyist and consultant for the two Texas plants.

Changes came about January 19, 2007, when the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled that horse slaughter for human consumption is illegal in Texas.

"That decision overturns a lower federal district court's ruling last year that

a 1949 Texas law banning horse slaughter for human food was invalid because it had already been repealed by another statute and preempted by federal law," explained Charles Stenholm of the Washington, D.C.-based Horse Welfare Coalition, representing more than 200 organizations.

"The panel of three judges on the 5th Circuit disagreed with the earlier decision, saying that the law stood on its own merits and was still enforceable," Stenholm pointed out.

Plants were forced to abide by the ruling. Dallas Crown Inc. in Kaufman is still processing horse meat for zoos only, Bradshaw said. "While the Beltex Corporation in nearby Fort Worth is open for exotic animal slaughter, the plant is not handling any horses at this time," he added.

"A third horse processing facility run by Cavel International Inc. in DeKalb, Ill., is not affected by the ruling, and it is continuing to process horses as food for export. No zoo food is produced there at this time," Stenholm stated.

The three foreign-owned plants slaughtered 88,000

horses and mules in 2005, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. Last year's number has not been reported.

"The new 5th Circuit ruling has been appealed, and efforts may be made to get the Texas Legislature to repeal the law," Stenholm commented.

"If the ruling is not put down, we are prepared to go to the Supreme Court," Bradshaw contended.

An already depressed horse market has suffered further declines with this action, Bradshaw recognized. "While the price of horse meat overseas has gone up considerably, the

bottom has dropped out of floor prices on horses in this country, due to lack of processing facilities," he added.

"In general, the lack of processing facilities coupled with heavy government regulation only reduces the amount a horse owner can earn from their livestock," emphasized James Tucker at Cavel International, Inc.

Local horse market officials indicate that rumors are perhaps affecting prices for horses more than the actual slaughter rulings.

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Horse meat is all shipped overseas to Europe, Japan and other places, where it is sold at about the same price as beef in supermarkets. No horse meat is used in pet foods in this country, but there is demand for fresh horse meat as food for "big cats" in zoos. Products from horse plants also go for shoe leather, cosmetics, heart valves, pharmaceuticals, etc.

"In the meantime, federal legislation is also still in the works to stop horse slaughter completely in the United States," Stenholm emphasized.

Proposed legislation to amend the Horse Protection Act would prohibit the shipping, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling and donation of horses to be slaughtered for human consumption, explained Dr. Mark Lutschauinig.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the Humane Society of the United States and other emotional animal rights groups support the legislation. They are backed by the likes of Texas oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens, country music star Willie Nelson and actress Bo Derek.

"They argue that killing

of horses is un-American, but they never address the questions of what will be done with the 80,000-plus unwanted horses each year in the United States," Lutschauinig stressed.

"These horses would be exposed to potential abandonment and neglect," Stenholm predicted. "They would compete for adoption with the 32,000 wild

horses that U.S. taxpayers are already paying \$40 million to shelter and feed."

None of the officials would predict the outcome of the horse slaughter dilemma. "It's such an emotional issue, and the opposition to horse slaughter has so much financial backing and such a loud voice that one can't be certain

what will happen in the world of politics," Stenholm analyzed.

"We are all in agreement that we love horses, and we want them humanely treat-

ed from birth to death. There's no disagreement on that; it's just that some of these supporters don't look at the issue realistically," Stenholm analyzed.

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