



Front Range Equine Rescue

Front Range Equine Rescue Discovers Would-Be Horse Slaughterer Falsified Federal Application, Has Committed Multiple Felonies

Group Urges the United States Department of Agriculture to Deny Valley Meat's Application Based on Decades of Lawbreaking

(April 22, 2013)— Front Range Equine Rescue (“FRER”) notified the United States Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) that the owner of Valley Meat Company, in Roswell, New Mexico, recently made blatantly false statements about his criminal record on two applications to begin slaughtering healthy American horses. If USDA grants Valley Meat’s application, it will be condoning the kind of conduct that jeopardizes the health and safety of consumers, increases the chances of horse meat showing up in American beef, and threatens the integrity of the federal meat inspection system.

In the past seventeen months, Valley Meat has submitted to USDA’s Food Safety Inspection Service (“FSIS”) three applications so that Valley Meat can begin slaughtering horses. On two of these applications, Mr. De Los Santos committed federal felonies when he falsely stated that he had no criminal history of felony convictions. The third application, submitted in March 2013, confirms his criminal history.

If Mr. De Los Santos had not lied about his criminal record on these applications, FSIS could have denied his application and thwarted his plans. Federal law requires persons who want to conduct slaughter operations to be approved and inspected by FSIS. Federal law also gives FSIS discretion to deny any applicant who has been convicted of a felony. On Valley Meat’s December 2011 and March 2012 applications for inspection, when asked to list all of his felony convictions, State or Federal, Mr. De Los Santos falsely answered: “None.” In fact, Mr. De Los Santos has been convicted of two felonies—once for a residential burglary, and once for criminal trespass.

The letter sent by FRER explains that while Mr. De Los Santos’s “decades-long criminal history and recent felonious actions are more than sufficient for FSIS to deny Valley Meat’s application for inspection . . . , Mr. De Los Santos’s refusal to play by the rules while Valley Meat [previously] operated as a cattle slaughter facility provides further reason to deny Valley Meat’s application.” The letter documents a pattern of noncompliance and disregard for numerous environmental, food safety, and humane handling laws by Valley Meat, demonstrating its utter lack of fitness to operate a horse slaughter facility. FRER also notified authorities of Mr. De Los Santos’s intentional false statements on the two FSIS applications.

Hilary Wood, President of Front Range Equine Rescue, states: “This evidence of criminal misconduct in connection with Valley Meat’s application for slaughter, combined with the long history of other violations, should compel FSIS to deny the application. Because horses are not raised to be food, virtually all horse meat from American horses is adulterated as a result of the veterinary drugs and other substances regularly administered to them. The tainted nature of horse meat plus Mr. De Los Santos’s pattern of disregard for the law makes Valley Meat a direct threat to the integrity of the food supply.”

In November 2011, Congress authorized the inspection of horses for slaughter in America, something that had been prohibited since 2006. Earlier this year, the Obama administration determined that FSIS must review—but not necessarily approve—Valley Meat’s application. FSIS has clear authority under federal law to deny the application as a result of Mr. De Los Santos’s criminal history and his recent actions to conceal that history. In fact, FSIS has exercised this authority in the past, withdrawing its grant of inspection from a California meatpacking firm in 2001 for its owner’s failure to disclose felony convictions on the company’s application for inspection.

FRER is represented by lawyers at Schiff Hardin.

Facts:

- Title 18, Section 1001 of the United States Code makes it a felony punishable by up to 5 years of prison for knowingly and willfully making a “materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement or representation” on a federal application.
- Title 21, Section 671 of the United States Code gives the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to deny an application for inspection of any establishment that is unfit to conduct slaughter operations as a result of any felony conviction of its owner.
- Throughout his career in the slaughter industry, Valley Meat’s owner has consistently violated environmental, animal welfare, and food safety laws.
- Ensuring the honesty and integrity of slaughter facilities is integral to FSIS’s efforts to protect the food supply.

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Front Range Equine Rescue is a 501c3 non-profit working to end the abuse and neglect of horses through rescue and education. Since 1997, FRER has assisted thousands of horses through its rescue and educational programs. Many of FRER’s rescued horses are obtained directly from livestock auctions and feed lots, which without FRER’s intervention would have shipped to slaughter. Dedicated to the horses – On the web at www.fronrangeequinerescue.org.