

## **Animal Welfare Groups Plan Suit in Response to USDA Decision to Support the Slaughter of Horses for Human Consumption**

(June 28, 2013)— The U.S. Department of Agriculture has given the green light for the grisly practice of horse slaughter to resume on U.S. soil. The agency approved an application for horse slaughter inspections under federal law at a plant in New Mexico. This news comes on the heels of the U.S. House and Senate appropriations committees' votes to halt all funding for horse slaughter in FY 2014. The decision means that the federal government could potentially spend millions of taxpayer dollars to start up inspections at horse slaughter plants, only to have Congress terminate the process in the coming months.

In response to the USDA's decision, The Humane Society of the United States and Front Range Equine Rescue plan to file suit immediately against the USDA to put a stop to this agency decision. The two groups previously informed USDA that they would take aggressive legal action against the agency, in light of the serious unresolved environmental and food safety issues surrounding horse slaughter.

Jonathan Lovvorn, senior vice president and chief counsel for animal protection litigation at The HSUS, said: "The USDA's decision to start up domestic horse slaughter, while at the same time asking Congress to defund it, is bizarre and unwarranted. Slaughter plants have a history of polluting their communities and producing horsemeat that is tainted with a dangerous cocktail of banned drugs. We intend to hold the Obama administration accountable in federal court for this inhumane, wasteful and illegal decision."

Hilary Wood, president of Front Range Equine Rescue, said: "America's horses are not raised as food animals, and they receive numerous substances during their lives making them unfit and illegal for human consumption. Adding insult to injury, the suffering of the horses in the slaughter pipeline and the danger to humans makes this action more than inhumane. Horses bound for slaughter have many alternatives open to them including re-training, re-homing, and humane euthanasia. We remain committed to stopping this insult to justice and our sense of justice."

The USDA's approval is particularly surprising, considering the recent scandal in the European Union, where horsemeat was discovered in food products labeled as beef. The operation of horse slaughter plants in the U.S. will make it more difficult to prevent the commingling between horsemeat and beef products that occurred in Europe.

Horses are raised as pets and for use in show, sport, work and recreation in the U.S. and are regularly administered drugs that are expressly prohibited by current federal regulations for use in animals intended for human consumption. For example, a common pain reliever routinely administered to all types of horses, Phenylbutazone, is known to cause potentially fatal human diseases, and if the animal has taken the drug, the meat is adulterated and should not be eaten. There is also no system in the U.S. to track medications and veterinary treatments given to horses to ensure that their meat is safe.

Any facility slaughtering thousands of horses will necessarily be processing the blood, organs and remains of animals whose tissues and blood may contain significant amounts of dangerous substances, which are either known to be dangerous, or which have never been tested on humans and therefore present completely unknown dangers. At least six applications for horse slaughter inspections have been filed with the USDA.

**Background:**

- This month, the U.S. House and Senate Appropriations committees voted to block funding for inspections of horse slaughter plants. President Obama's proposed FY 2014 budget also included a request for Congress to prevent tax dollars from supporting horse slaughter.
- The HSUS and FRER also filed petitions with USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to declare horsemeat unfit for human consumption. USDA denied that petition.
- According to a national poll conducted last year, 80 percent of Americans disapprove of horse slaughter.
- "Kill buyers" gather up horses from random sources and profit by selling healthy horses for slaughter that bring the best price per pound for their meat. USDA reports show that approximately 92 percent of American horses going to slaughter are healthy and would otherwise be able to go on to lead productive lives.
- The methods used to kill horses rarely result in quick, painless deaths, as horses often endure repeated blows to render them unconscious and sometimes remain conscious during the slaughtering process. When horse slaughter plants previously operated in the U.S., the USDA documented severe injuries to horses in the slaughter pipeline, including broken bones and eyeballs hanging from a thread of skin.
- The Safeguard American Food Exports Act, H.R. 1094 / S. 541, introduced this year by U.S. Sens. Mary Landrieu, D-La., and Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Reps. Patrick Meehan, R-Pa., and Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., is a bipartisan measure that would outlaw horse slaughter operations in the U.S., end the current export of American horses for slaughter abroad, and protect the public from consuming toxic horsemeat.