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## **Animal Welfare Groups, New Mexico Leaders Express Great Disappointment in USDA's Decision to Process Application for Horse Slaughter Plant Inspections**

WASHINGTON (March 1, 2013) – The Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), Front Range Equine Rescue and Animal Protection of New Mexico strongly criticized a decision by the Obama administration to process an application for inspecting horse slaughter at a New Mexico facility on the grounds that killing horses for human consumption is inhumane and creates a serious health risk to consumers.

If the application is approved, Valley Meat Company LLC will be the first facility in the U.S. to slaughter horses for human consumption since 2007, when the few remaining plants closed after Congress chose to eliminate funding for horse meat inspections. This surprising move toward reopening a horse slaughter plant plays out against a scandal unfolding in the European Union, where consumers have been alarmed by the discovery in prepared food products of horse meat mislabeled as beef. The federal government could potentially spend its resources to open new horse slaughter plants at a time when the sequestration is looming and spending cuts could affect food safety inspections for U.S. meat products.

Legitimate concerns about the health risks associated with consuming the meat of horses that are often treated with drugs that are prohibited for use in animals slaughtered for food, as well as the discovery of these drugs in horse meat exported from Canada and Mexico, have prompted The HSUS and Humane Society International to call for a moratorium on the sale in the EU of the meat of horses of U.S. origin.

“Slaughtering horses for human consumption is archaic, inhumane, and unsafe, given the medicine chest of drugs often administered to horses and prohibited for human consumption,” said Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The HSUS. “It is astonishing that we may see the resumption of horse slaughter on U.S. soil while Europe is still reeling from a horse meat scandal. Have we not learned anything about the industry’s deception in Europe and the turmoil it has caused?”

“If the USDA moves forward with allowing the cruel and toxic horse slaughter industry to enter our country, this administration is leading our nation in precisely the wrong direction,” said Nancy Perry, senior vice president of ASPCA Government Relations.

“Recent polling shows that 80 percent of the American public overwhelmingly opposes the slaughtering of horses for human consumption, and given the current firestorm of concern and outrage over horse meat entering the food supply in Europe, it is time for Congress to prevent even one more American horse from suffering this terrible fate and stop horse slaughter in the U.S. once and for all.”

“The slaughter of American horses for meat is an unnecessary and tragic end for these icons of our nation’s history,” said Hilary Wood, president of Front Range Equine Rescue. “American horses will suffer cruel deaths in New Mexico and will continue to be slaughtered abroad. Horse slaughter also brings a potentially toxic environmental threat to the state, with horses’ lives ending with a terrifying death, to be turned into an expensive and possibly toxic dinner.”

“New Mexicans have repeatedly rejected the idea of a horse slaughter plant in our state,” said Lisa Jennings, executive director of Animal Protection of New Mexico. “Horses are a valuable part of our heritage, and we’re determined to develop a robust safety net for them, not condemn them to slaughter.”

“I still oppose the opening of a horse slaughtering plant in New Mexico, and I am concerned about the impact it would have on local consumers,” said New Mexico’s Attorney General, Gary K. King. “The horse meat scandal in Europe has raised concerns about human health risks associated with consuming the meat of U.S. horses. Many horses may have been treated with drugs prohibited by U.S. and European regulations from ever being administered to animals that enter the food chain. A horse slaughtering plant in our state that produces meat for human consumption is still a bad idea.”

“As a veterinarian, natural resource manager, and someone who has had the great good fortune to grow up with and around horses, I am very concerned about their health and safety. If a horse is hurt, terminally ill, or has no chance to find a loving home, then humane euthanasia is an important option,” said New Mexico State Land Commissioner Ray Powell, D.V.M. “I am told the United States Department of Agriculture is considering the proposal to open a horse slaughtering facility in our state. Since we do not have enough unwanted horses in New Mexico to make this economically viable, it means horses would be trucked in from across the nation. We do not have the safeguards and oversight in place to ensure their humane handling, transport, and euthanasia. New Mexico can do much better by these intelligent and gentle creatures and I strongly oppose this ill-conceived proposal.”

Horses are not raised for slaughter in the U.S. and are often treated with a variety of drugs that are prohibited for use in animals slaughtered for human consumption. There is no system in the U.S. to track medications given to horses to ensure that horse meat is safe for human consumption. The HSUS and Front Range Equine Rescue have petitioned the USDA and Food and Drug Administration to declare American horse meat unfit for human consumption because of this food safety issue. The FDA and USDA have not yet responded to the petitions.

The HSUS and Front Range Equine Rescue have already announced their intention to file suit if USDA approves Valley Meat’s application.

When Valley Meat sued the USDA to speed up the processing of its application to slaughter horses for human consumption, groups in the U.S. beef industry intervened in support of Valley Meat. With beef sales waning in Europe in the wake of the horse meat

scandal, it is surprising that beef producers are willing to risk consumer confidence in the entire U.S. meat industry just to prop up a marginalized horse slaughter trade.

This decision by USDA adds further to the burden on U.S. taxpayers – already apprehensive under the looming threat of spending cuts to meat inspection programs as a result of sequestration – who will be forced to fund inspections at the horse slaughter facility even though Americans do not consume horse meat and oppose the slaughter of American horses. The HSUS, ASPCA, FRER and APNM urge Congress to reintroduce and swiftly pass legislation to outlaw horse slaughter in the U.S. and ban the export of live horses across our borders to be slaughtered.

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