



AN EQUINE VETERINARY VIEW OF H.R. 857 AND HORSE SLAUGHTER IN THE UNITED STATES

Approximately 55,000 horses are slaughtered each year in the United States. These horses are most often sent to a processing facility because they are no longer serviceable, are infirm, dangerous, or their owners are no longer able to care for them. The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), a professional association with a membership of 7,500 equine veterinarians and veterinary students worldwide, is dedicated to protecting the health and welfare of the horse and considers horse slaughter to be an important welfare issue for the entire equine industry.

The AAEP has examined the transportation of horses to slaughter and their subsequent processing for over a decade. The AAEP's position on this issue states that the slaughter of unwanted horses at processing facilities is currently a necessary aspect of the equine industry in order to provide a humane alternative to allowing a horse to continue a life of discomfort or pain and possibly inadequate care or abandonment.

The AAEP is not pro-slaughter; we are pro-welfare of the horse. Our association believes slaughter is not the most desirable option for addressing the problem of unwanted horses. However, if a horse owner is not able or willing to provide humane care, the AAEP believes that euthanasia at a processing facility is a humane alternative to a life of suffering, inadequate care and possibly abandonment.

Regarding H.R. 857, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, the AAEP would consider supporting its passage if the following revisions were made to the bill:

- I. Funding of care for unwanted horses.** While H.R. 857 states that federal funds may be appropriated to care for horses that are confiscated from violators of this act (that is, those who are illegally transporting horses for slaughter), this provision does not address financial support for unwanted horses that are voluntarily given up by their owners. Assuming an average cost of \$5 per day for providing a horse's basic needs, the funding needed per year, per horse is approximately \$1,825. This does not include veterinary and farrier care. The AAEP is concerned that horse rescue and retirement groups in the United States will not have adequate resources, without federal funding, to meet a potential increase in owner "giveups."

II. Development of a specific enforcement plan to stop illegal transporters.

Slaughter plants exist in Mexico and Canada. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 28,542 horses from the U.S. were exported to Canada for slaughter in 2002. If humane slaughter is banned in the United States, it is imperative that U.S. authorities aggressively enforce the law to prevent a black market of horses transported out of country. H.R. 857 does not specify which federal, state or local agencies will be asked to help enforce the act or in what capacity they will be used.

The illegal shipment of U.S. horses to foreign countries presents many welfare concerns. Horses will be on transport vehicles for much longer periods of time. More importantly, USDA humane transport regulations and oversight do not apply to foreign plants. Nor will USDA veterinarians be on site at the foreign slaughter plants to ensure proper handling of the horses and their humane euthanasia. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) in 2000 issued its recommendations on acceptable methods of euthanasia for horses and other animals. Captive bolt, which is the method used at U.S. processing facilities, is considered an acceptable and humane method of euthanasia by veterinarians. There is no guarantee that humane methods will be used in non-U.S. facilities.

The AAEP believes that the transport of horses to foreign slaughter facilities greatly jeopardizes the health and welfare of the horse. If H.R. 857 is passed, it is crucial that a specific plan to stop the illegal transport of horses be in place and enforced.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners, headquartered in Lexington, Ky., was founded in 1954 as a non-profit organization dedicated to the health and welfare of the horse. Currently, AAEP reaches more than 5 million horse owners through its over 7,500 members worldwide and is actively involved in ethics issues, practice management, research and continuing education in the equine veterinary profession and horse industry.