

## Executive Summary

The Horse Slaughter Prevention Act would prohibit the shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling or donation of equines for humane processing for human consumption. The legislation offers no disposal alternative to the humane euthanasia under veterinary inspection that is currently provided in processing facilities, causing livestock experts to fear that animal welfare would actually decline if this legislation becomes law.

## Issue Background

Horses have long played a vital role in American agriculture.

Today America's farmers and ranchers continue to rely on horses to help with daily tasks. Horses are also used by some Americans for recreational purposes and as pets. The close working relationship between the rider and his or her horse has resulted in a large percentage of the U.S. population perceiving equines as pets rather than livestock. This perception has inspired animal rights activists, celebrities and average citizens to rally in support of a ban on equine processing. But, legal-

ly, horses are considered livestock, not pets (U.S. Congress, 2002).

In 2005, Congress voted to temporarily end federal funding of government-mandated inspection of equine processing facilities, causing processors to assume sole financial responsibility for inspection services previously provided by the Agriculture Department. Last year, the House passed legislation banning equine processing by an overwhelming majority of 263-146. However, the 109th Congress concluded before the Senate considered the bill.

Not only is the initiative being pursued in Washington, but

Issue Briefing  
Animal Welfare:

## Horse Slaughter

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state activists have been victorious and continue to gain momentum. After collecting more than 740,000 signatures, Proposition 6, Save the Horses, qualified for California's November 1998 ballot and was approved by nearly 5 million (60 percent) California voters. An anti-slaughter bill was approved by the Illinois Senate in 2004, but it was defeated in the House. In addition, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit recently upheld the enforcement of a 1949 Texas law outlawing the sale of horsemeat for human consumption in that state.

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## AFBF Policy

AFBF Policy 98, Equine (excerpted)

“We support legislation and rulings that allow the sale, possession and transport of horses intended for processing; domestic ownership, control and location of equine processing facilities; the classification of horses as livestock; and funding for Food

Safety and Inspection Service inspectors in facilities that slaughter horses.

“We oppose the passage of the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act or similar legislation. We oppose the classification of horses as companion animals and any regulations that prohibit the harvest of equines.”

## Economic Analysis

The direct and indirect economic effects of banning equine processing for human consumption are substantial. Proponents have not addressed the inevitable costs of such a ban, and they have offered no alternative. Researchers from six U.S. universities concluded the following:

- Horse owners will realize a direct effect from lower horse sale prices;
- Local and state governments will be adversely impacted by increased costs of regulation and care of unwanted or neglected horses;
- Public animal rescue facilities are currently saturated with unwanted horses, and no funding has been allocated to manage a large increase in horses that will likely become the responsibility of these facilities; and
- Eliminating the possibility of selling a horse for processing was estimated to decrease the value of all U.S. horses by \$304 per horse.

If a processing ban is imposed, the annual decrease in value for horses that would have been processed in the U.S. would be between \$19.7 million and \$28.8 million.

The researchers also determined the following costs of maintaining unwanted horses, as well as the cost to the U.S. economy and producers that will accumulate over time:

- A conservative estimate of the total cost of caring for unwanted horses, based upon 2005 statistics, is \$220 million;
- Cumulative annual maintenance costs of otherwise processed horses, since the year 2000, would have exceeded more than \$513 million through 2005; and
- The export value of horsemeat for human consumption was in excess of \$60 million (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service).

The study also noted that options for equine carcass disposal are few and decreasing. Private land burial and disposal in landfills have great potential for negative environmental effects, and the cost of proper disposal is high.

For more information about this study, visit [www.animalwelfarecouncil.com/html/pdf/consequences.pdf](http://www.animalwelfarecouncil.com/html/pdf/consequences.pdf).

## What's Happening Now?

Companion legislation proposed in the House and Senate (H.R. 503/S. 311) is identical to the bill approved by the House in 2006. As of mid-March 2007, there are 124 co-sponsors in the House and 21 in the Senate, representing the support of more than 20 percent of the entire Congress.

During consideration of two upcoming pieces of legislation—the annual funding bill for the Agriculture Department and the 2007 farm bill—there will be attempts by animal rights groups to attach this and other initiatives. If this bill is enacted, 100,000 horses—which represents the 1 percent of the 9.2 million-head U.S. horse population that is humanely processed each year—would have an undetermined future. The legislation provides no options or funding for the feeding, shelter and care of these unwanted, unmanageable or abandoned animals.

As a result of a decision made by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, the Texas Farm Bureau, American Quarter Horse Association, Texas cattle groups and the two Texas equine processing facilities are mounting a state legislative effort to repeal a nearly 60-year-old law that bans the sale of horsemeat for human consumption.

Also on the state level, bills to ban the transport of horses to slaughter have been proposed in the Kentucky and Illinois legislatures. Activist groups also have pressured airlines to stop transporting horsemeat overseas.

## Public Relations Resources

### Talking Points:

- Euthanasia at a processing facility is an approved humane practice according to the American Veterinary Medical Association ([www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)) and other accredited animal health professionals.
- Banning equine processing compromises the welfare of abandoned or neglected horses. Supporters of the ban argue that unwanted horses can move to adoption facilities, yet the average capacity of an equine adoption facility in the U.S. is 30 animals. This means in the first year alone, the U.S. would need 2,700 such facilities, according to the American Association of Equine Practitioners ([www.aaep.org](http://www.aaep.org)).
- Unlike processing facilities that are regulated for compliance with animal welfare laws, so-called “rescue” or “adoption” shelters have no minimum care requirements, no inspection and no enforcement. Even the Humane Society of the United States, the lead proponent of legislation to ban equine processing, says the standards of care at existing “adoption facilities are less well-established than cat and dog shelters.”
- It would cost \$1,900 per year to house each unwanted and abandoned horse, not including farrier or veterinary services. It will cost approximately \$127 million to properly care for these animals if this legislation is enacted. Since adoption facilities receive no public money and the legislation itself provides no funding, who will pay these costs?
- The proposed legislation has no provisions to address the disposal of thousands of horse carcasses that could no longer be processed if the bill is approved. Improper burial or landfill disposal will lead to serious water contamination and could result in animal and human exposure to zoonotic diseases and related problems.
- There is no scientific basis for this legislation, and Congress is not the appropriate venue to decide the cultural acceptability of horse processing and consumption. To ban a legitimate livestock product for reasons other than food safety or public health would set a dangerous precedent for consumers and agriculture.
- A prohibition on processing of equines will create a negative precedent for the beef, pork and poultry industries by legitimizing efforts to end consumption of food derived from any animals.

## Other Effects

If this legislation passes, it would infringe on property rights by decreasing the value of horses in the United States, but it also would set up a slippery slope for animal agriculture. The prohibition on processing equines will create a negative precedent for other ani-

mal protein segments such as beef, pork and poultry, by legitimizing non-scientific or non-food-safety-related efforts to end consumption of food derived from any animals.

The animal agriculture sector and industry directly provides

income to more than 520,000 processing plant employees in all 50 states, in addition to thousands more farmers, ranchers, contractors and hundreds of local communities across the country.

## Related Organizations

**Animal Agriculture Alliance**—This organization ([www.animal-agalliance.org](http://www.animal-agalliance.org)) provides a united voice for advocates of animal agriculture to provide science-based information to a wide audience. It also is the umbrella organization under which AFBF and others monitor and engage the Pew Charitable Trusts' National Commis-

sion on Industrial Farm Animal Production ([www.ncifap.org](http://www.ncifap.org)).

**Animal Welfare Council**—Members of the Animal Welfare Council include organizations that interact with animals. The Animal Welfare Council is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization established for charitable and educational purposes ([\[animalwelfarecouncil.com/html/aw/about.php\]\(http://animalwelfarecouncil.com/html/aw/about.php\)\).](http://www.</a></p>
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**Common Horse Sense Coalition**—This alliance of organizations ([www.commonhorsesense.com](http://www.commonhorsesense.com)) includes agriculture, veterinary, municipal and horse groups dedicated to educating legislators about the negative consequences of a ban on equine processing.

## Issue Background

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Proponents of the legislation rely solely, but effectively, on emotional arguments. Opponents have abundant science on their side, but it has been difficult to translate those facts in a manner that resonates with the public.

The American Veterinary Medical Association ([www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)) has two accepted methods of euthanasia for horses, one of which is the method used at processing facilities “resulting in an immediate, painless and humane death.” Not only is equine processing an approved method of euthana-

sia, according to AVMA and the American Association of Equine Practitioners ([www.aaep.org](http://www.aaep.org)), but the entire process is monitored and inspected by the Agriculture Department for food safety and animal welfare compliance.

Several research-based studies have concluded that equine processing is humane and actually prevents animal neglect. Last year, economists from Cal Poly, Texas A&M, Utah State, West Texas A&M, the University of Louisville and the University of California conducted a comprehensive review of the potential consequences of a

ban on equine processing. A Colorado State University study found there would be an increase in equines transported to “Mexico or underground markets,” thus the horse slaughter plants “should be encouraged to remain open.” They also found that a ban on equine processing “will increase the number of horses which will die from neglect,” concluding that “tens of thousands of horses could be neglected.”

## For More Information

The following AFBF staff members have assembled this issue briefing:

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## Additional Resources

Additional information is posted on Farm Bureau's intranet site, SILO, at <http://silofb.org/issues/livestock>. Among the resources posted on the Livestock Issues Management page on SILO are news clips, links to past Issues Management Briefings about related issues and links to agricultural law programs around the U.S. Links to related conference calls and PowerPoint slide presentations also are posted on this page.