



## American Veterinary Medical Association Governmental Relations Division

1910 Sunderland Place NW Washington, DC 2036-1642

Phone 202.789.0007 / 800.321.1473 Fax 202.842.4360

[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)

---

# Horse Slaughter Prevention Legislation and Appropriations Riders H.R. 1094/S. 541 Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act of 2013

## AVMA Position: Active Pursuit of Defeat

### Background:

- Horse slaughter has not occurred in the U.S. since 2007 due to a combination of state bans and an annual restriction on USDA funds for inspection of horse processing facilities.
- The USDA funding ban was lifted in late 2011 by the FY2012 Agricultural Appropriations bill (H.R. 2112, 112<sup>th</sup> Congress), however there are currently no horse processing facilities operating in the US.
- Since 2007 the market for horses bound for slaughter has shifted to Canada and Mexico. In 2010 almost the same number of horses were transported to Canada and Mexico for slaughter, about 138,000, as were slaughtered domestically prior to the cessation of horse slaughter in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2011 the GAO released a report on the status of horse welfare in the US since the cessation of domestic horse slaughter<sup>1</sup>:
  - The GAO took a thorough and balanced look at the impact of the cessation of horse processing on the welfare of US horses.
  - The GAO confirmed that the closure of the processing plants, coupled with the poor economy and high feed costs, has had a negative impact on horse welfare. These negative impacts include:
    - Horses traveling longer distances to processing facilities in Mexico and Canada
    - Increase in horse abandonments
    - Increase in horse abuse and neglect
  - The AVMA believes these negative ramifications must be considered by Congress when debating the future of the horse processing plants.
  - The AVMA supports improving USDA resources to adequately enforce the Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter regulations.
  - The AVMA supports stronger penalties for transporters who do not comply with the Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter regulations.
  - The AVMA supports the phase-out of double-decker trucks for the transportation of horses.
  - The AVMA supports the efforts of groups like the Unwanted Horse Coalition, whose mission is to reduce the number of unwanted horses and to improve their welfare through education, as well as the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety, and responsible breeding, care and disposition of horses.

### Justification:

- **Unintended Consequences:** The passage of this legislation, without adequate funding or an infrastructure in place to care for unwanted horses, will create a series of unintended consequences that negatively impact the health and welfare of the horse.
- **Long-term placement of affected horses:** Horse slaughter prevention legislation and appropriations riders fail to address how and where unwanted horses will be placed. If these bills are passed, tens of

*The AVMA is the recognized voice for the profession, representing over 81,500 member veterinarians. The objective of the AVMA is to advance the science and art of veterinary medicine including its relationship to public health, biological science, and agriculture.*



## American Veterinary Medical Association Governmental Relations Division

1910 Sunderland Place NW Washington, DC 2036-1642

Phone 202.789.0007 / 800.321.1473 Fax 202.842.4360

[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)

---

thousands of U.S. horses will need to be placed in alternative homes, or be euthanized and disposed of properly.

- While there are many equine rescue and retirement facilities providing homes for unwanted horses, their care capacities range from five horses to, in a few cases, a maximum of 1,000 horses. *The capacity at most facilities, however, is 30 horses or less.*
  - In the first year alone of this ban, assuming an average capacity of 30 horses per facility, approximately 4,697 equine rescue facilities would be needed. Based on these numbers, there are currently not enough volunteers or placement opportunities to provide the level of care that will be required annually.
  - Many of these facilities are already at or near capacity.
- **Animal Welfare:** While many nonprofit equine rescue facilities are well run, regulations must be put in place to establish standards of care to ensure the humane treatment of these unwanted horses.
  - **Funding of care for unwanted horses:** Horse slaughter prevention legislation and appropriations riders do not address the funding required for care or euthanasia and disposal of tens of thousands of horses per year. The average cost to care for the unwanted horse is estimated at \$3,648 per year.<sup>2</sup> ***Inadequate funding often creates inadequate care, which is a significant welfare concern for unwanted horses.***
  - **Current USDA Authority:** Horse slaughter prevention legislation and appropriations riders could undermine current USDA efforts to enforce humane transportation standards for horses being transported for the purpose of slaughter. USDA is currently able to assess civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per horse (per violation) of the USDA Slaughter Horse Transport Program. During a 2008 Judiciary Hearing on this issue, Mr. Pacelle, CEO of HSUS, suggested that the predominate animal welfare issue is **NOT** the method of euthanasia; but rather, inhumane transportation of horses over long distances that is so egregious. This being said, it is imperative that the USDA can continue to enforce the current statutes and ensure the **HUMANE** transportation of horses. The USDA is making improvements to this program, most recently with the release of their final rule on the Commercial Transport of Equines to Slaughter (<http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=APHIS-2006-0168-0094>) which extends authority over the entire transport chain of equines to slaughter. Previously regulations only covered horses from the last assembly point, feedlot, or stockyard to the border crossing with Canada or Mexico.

### AVMA Contact:

Dr. Whitney Miller, Assistant Director, Governmental Relations Division, 202-289-3211, [wmillers@avma.org](mailto:wmillers@avma.org)

### References:

1. GAO, *Horse Welfare: Action Needed to Address Unintended Consequences from Cessation of Domestic Slaughter*, 2011, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-228#recommendations>.
2. Holcumb, K.E., C.L. Stull and P.H. Kass. "Unwanted horses: The role of nonprofit equine rescue and sanctuary organizations". *Journal of Animal Science* 2010. 88: 4142-4150.

*The AVMA is the recognized voice for the profession, representing over 81,500 member veterinarians. The objective of the AVMA is to advance the science and art of veterinary medicine including its relationship to public health, biological science, and agriculture.*