

The New York State Horse Council Position on Equine Slaughter

The New York Horse Council (NYHC) opposes abusive or inhumane treatment of horses under any circumstance. The New York State Horse Council (NYSHC) has been working for years to establish ways to provide alternatives to slaughter for unwanted horses. Currently, there are over 75 formal organizations in the U.S. that provide adoption programs for horses that are no longer viable for their first intended use. Additionally, there are thousands of individuals doing what they can to find homes and useful lives for unwanted horses. Are the alternatives working? Yes, equine slaughter in the U.S. is down from a high of 350,000 horses per year and 15 processing facilities to 60,000 horses per year and three processing facilities in 2000. Can we do better? Certainly, but the organizations and individuals involved with horse rescue need your support. They are providing all the alternatives they can with current resources. More financial help is desperately needed.

NYSHC does not feel that a legal ban on horse slaughter will solve the problem of unwanted horses - a ban on slaughter may only increase the potential for abuse. The decision to send a horse to a processing facility where it will be slaughtered, like other livestock, for human consumption is a personal one. Although certainly not the most desirable, slaughter is one way of disposing of horses that cannot be taken care of or no longer have any viable use. Taking this option away from individuals could make conditions worse for some horses. If a horse cannot be sold at a sale because it may go to a processing facility, it may well become a candidate for abuse and suffer a much worse fate than humane euthanasia.

The disposal of a horse's carcass is also a concern. In many areas, state or local laws make it illegal to bury a horse on private property or dump the carcass in a landfill. To some, the cost of disposal of a horse may be so high that they are simply left to stand in a field until their death. The instantaneous death at a federally inspected and regulated processing facility is more humane than a slow lingering death from starvation. These facilities must comply with strict federal and state codes designed for the care of these horses. These codes govern euthanasia, as well as the methods used, and provide for the safety of the meat produced.

In March 1996, Congress passed the Commercial Transportation of Equine for Slaughter Act. This legislation gives the Secretary of Agriculture authority to regulate individuals regularly engaged in the business of transporting equine to slaughter facilities. NYSHC and the American Horse Council (AHC) supported this bill which seeks to protect the welfare of horses being shipped to slaughter facilities. In May 1999, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service proposed rules for the regulation of the commercial shipment of equines. The final rule has been signed by the Secretary of Agriculture and adopted by USDA in the near future; and while not perfect or all encompassing, they are a positive step forward.

What can you do to rescue the horse?

1. Support adoption facilities that are striving to retrain and place unwanted horses in second careers.
2. Encourage the New York Legislature through your legislator to provide adequate funding of current legislation regarding animal abuse.

The solution is not a legal ban on slaughter. The solution is to find more effective alternatives than slaughter for unwanted horses.