

Horse Management

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Summary

In the 110th Congress, there is renewed interest in legislation that will institute a federal ban on horse processing. Senator Mary L. Landrieu (D-La.) introduced S. 311, a bill that would amend the Horse Protection Act to prohibit the "shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling, or donation of any horse or other equine to be slaughtered for human consumption."

H.R. 503 was also reintroduced in the House by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.). In the 109th Congress, the House approved H.R. 503 by a vote of 263-146 on September 8, 2006. This **bill was opposed by more than** 190 national and state organizations including the American Quarter Horse Association, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and NCBA. In addition, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns told the House Ag Committee, "USDA is opposed to H.R. 503 and all the amendments... In short, we believe that there is a significant probability that the enactment of this bill could result in a reduction in the humane treatment of horses."

NCBA opposes this action due to the precedent it would set for the banning of other meats for reasons other than science, safety, or public health; and the undue legislation it would put upon the animal production industry.

In addition, removing processing as a management option for horses actually poses a greater risk to horse welfare. As many as 90,000 horses will need care, food and shelter. H.R. 503 fails to address the problems of costs for care, the unintended mistreatment of these animals in non-regulated rescue facilities, and the environmental concerns of disposing of the carcasses.

Background

NCBA actively began fighting against this legislation in the 108th Congress when H.R. 857 was introduced by Rep. John Sweeney (R-N.Y.). NCBA kept that bill from getting a hearing in the House Agriculture Committee, and eventually killed the legislation. Rep. Sweeney came back in the 109th Congress with H.R. 503. Although unsuccessful in getting H.R. 503 attached to the Fiscal Year 2006 Agriculture Appropriations Bill, he did manage to strip USDA funding for inspection of the horse processing plants, and forced them to pay a fee for the USDA inspection service.

During debate on the Fiscal Year 2007 Ag Appropriations Bill (H.R. 5384), Mr. Sweeney once again tried to attach HR 503. Thanks to cattlemen input, the amendment by Rep.

Sweeney to eliminate funding for USDA's fee-for-service operations was never even brought to the floor..

Texas cattleman and NCBA member Paxton Ramsey testified July 27, 2006, before the House Ag Committee on this issue. Immediately following the hearing, the Committee produced a letter that says "it became clear to the Committee that H.R. 503 created many problems and contained no solutions." The Committee voted 37-3 to report the bill unfavorably with a recommendation that it not pass the House. The House Energy and Commerce Committee also held a hearing on the bill that week, but did not take a vote. The Committee eventually reported the bill out of Committee without a vote or recommendation from its members. It went to the floor and was passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 263 – 146.

There are only three plants in the U.S. that process horses. They are: Dallas Crown in Kaufman, Texas, Beltex in Fort Worth, Texas, and Caval International in DeKalb, Illinois. These plants processed approximately 100,000 horses last year. However, a decision by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans now makes the processing of horses for human consumption illegal in Texas. The decision, issued January 19, 2007, overturns a lower court's ruling last year on a 1949 Texas law that banned horse slaughter for the purpose of selling the meat for food. Two of the nations' three horse processors are located in Texas. Beltex Corp. of Fort Worth and Dallas Crown Inc. have both stopped processing horses for human consumption.

Talking Points

- Horses have been an extremely important part of ranching and have helped to build the U.S. beef industry into what it is today. Horses continue to play a crucial role on many cattle operations, and as such, we want to see these animals treated humanely and given the proper care and attention.
- Some horses, however, end up being unwanted by their owners. This can happen because they are unruly and deemed unmanageable, they are lame or sick, they are no longer able to be used as they once were, they were allowed to breed without control or management, they are too expensive or hard for an owner to maintain, or any number of additional reasons.
- The processing of horses is only one of many different species management options for horses. Others include adoption, rehabilitation, donation, and private purchase.
- The elimination of processing as a management option poses a risk to horse welfare. Some owners of unwanted horses want to recapture some value out of their animal. Without the ability to recapture value out of a horse at auction, it is expected that some owners will not spend money to have animals euthanized and taken to a renderer. This means that unwanted horses could be neglected or abandoned, and those that are sick or infirmed could be forced to suffer from discomfort and pain, while the healthier ones will starve to death. Both starvation and a life of pain are much worse treatment than humane euthanasia at processing.
- Unfortunately, not all horse adoption and rescue facilities have the resources or capabilities to care for these horses, so many will not be saved. It is doubtful that in a

time of shrinking budgets and under-funded programs that a Federal rescue program would get the full funding it needed to do the job. In addition, there is no federal regulation, oversight, or inspection of these facilities. The increase in horses due to government confiscations and voluntary give-ups will strain these facilities, and without oversight, it is possible that these animals could inadvertently be neglected and would suffer from otherwise good intentions.

- HR 503 and S 311 are alarming because it bans the processing of horses for reasons other than science, safety, or public health. The processing of horses is done under regulation by the USDA as mandated by the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906. USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service ensures that meat and meat products from these animals are safe, wholesome, and properly labeled. Meat inspectors are also charged with enforcing the Humane Slaughter Act which requires that animals be rendered unconscious prior to slaughter. In addition, the 1996 Farm Bill included the Commercial Transportation of Equine for Slaughter provision that mandates the humane treatment and protection of horses being transported to processing plants. These plants are subject to the same regulations, inspections, and humane treatment standards as other livestock processing plants. USDA vets are on hand to make sure these horses are not mistreated.

- This is an extremely emotional issue because horses are looked at as pets more than livestock. The processing of horses, however, is a well-regulated and extremely useful management option to keep horses from suffering, starving, and being mistreated by owners who don't want them. Again, this is just one of many management options available to protect these animals from mistreatment.