



"Improve the economic well-being of agriculture and enrich the quality of farm family life."

Let's Talk About: ***Equine Harvesting***

In 2007, after several years of animal rights activist pressure, all three remaining U.S. horse harvesting facilities were shut down. Prior to this date, 60,000 unwanted horses moved to USDA-regulated and inspected harvesting facilities and were slaughtered each year under Federal Humane Slaughter Act regulations. The closing of equine harvesting facilities is believed to be one of the contributors to the dramatic increase in unwanted horses in the U.S.ⁱ

Illinois Farm Bureau Policy

The Illinois Farm Bureau supports "options for end-of-life alternatives for equine including humane harvesting and harvesting for human consumption, or other uses to produce marketable products, provided all state and federal guidelines are observed." In addition, IFB supports "Continued full funding of federal meat inspectors for equine harvesting facilities" and states "We will seek legislation allowing equine harvesting in Illinois."ⁱⁱ

Unwanted Horses

- Unwanted horses represent a group of horses within the domestic equine population that are no longer needed or useful or their owners are no longer interested in or capable of providing financial or physical care.
- In 2009, the Unwanted Horse Coalition conducted the Unwanted Horses Survey and found that, based on thousands of respondent perceptions, the top contributors to the problem of unwanted horses are: downturn of the economy, closing of the nation's harvesting facilities, change in breed demand/indiscriminate breeding, and the high cost of euthanasia.ⁱⁱⁱ
- According to the American Association of Equine Practitioners, if a horse owner is unable or unwilling to provide humane care and no one is able to assume the responsibility, euthanasia at a harvesting facility in a manner designated as humane by the American Veterinary Medical Association is an acceptable alternative to a life of suffering, inadequate care or abandonment.^{iv}

Horse Ownership is a Luxury

- The American Welfare Council estimated that the cost to maintain an unwanted horse until its natural death averages \$2,340 per year per horse. Using a conservative estimate of a useful life of 20 years, followed by an 11-year retirement period, the average maintenance cost for retirement could be as high as \$25,740.^v

- Robert Lawrence of the Equine Industry Program at the University of Louisville estimates that the cost to care for all unwanted horses in the U.S. would be close to \$400 million dollars per year.^{vi}

Rescue Overcapacity

- “The estimated maximum capacity for the 326 eligible registered nonprofit equine rescue facilities of 13,400 is well below the widely published estimate of 100,000 horses that become unwanted in the U.S. every year.”^{vii}
- Six out of 10 rescue facilities (63%) report they are at near or full capacity and, on average, turn away 38% of the horses brought to them.^{viii}
- According to the American Veterinary Association, while there are many equine rescue and retirement facilities providing homes for unwanted horses, their care capacities range from five horses to a maximum of 1,000 horses. The capacity at most facilities, however, is 30 horses or less. In the first year of the harvesting ban alone, assuming an average capacity of 30 horses per facility, approximately 4,697 equine rescue facilities were needed.^{ix}

Expensive Alternatives

- Euthanasia and adoption are other possible options for owners of unwanted horses. The 2009 Unwanted Horse Survey found that the average cost of euthanasia and carcass disposal is \$385, while the average cost of donating a horse could reach \$1,000.^x This number reflects the requirements placed on donated horses, such as a veterinary exam, transportation costs, and boarding fees.

Increasing Animal Abuse Cases

- Since the 2007 U.S. plant closures, the number of horses being abused, neglected and abandoned, according to many reports, has increased. The Illinois Bureau of Animal Health and Welfare found that the percentage of horse docketed, or cruelty cases, in Illinois increased from 461 or 24.8% of cruelty cases 2006 to 318 or **38.64% of cruelty cases** in 2014.^{xi}
- Even after accounting for the recent economic downturn, the amount of abandoned and neglected horse cases has increased.^{xii}

Prolonged Trips to Canada or Mexico for Harvesting

- Presently the only option for many of today’s unwanted horses remains harvesting at facilities in Mexico or Canada.
- In 2012, 158,657 horses were exported to Mexico or Canada for slaughter.^{xiii}
- Prior to closure, U.S. harvesting facilities had a USDA representative on site at all times to ensure humane slaughter and compliance with federal slaughter laws. Slaughtering facilities in Canada and Mexico are not regulated by U.S. slaughter laws, nor supervised by USDA representatives.

Decreased Revenue and Job Loss

- In 2006, the U.S. exported 17,000 metric tons of horse meat valued at \$65 million.^{xiv}
- Because of the closure of U.S. harvesting plants in 2007 by state action in Illinois and Texas, the entire horse industry has been decimated. A \$1.2-billion industry supporting

460,000 full-time, direct jobs nationwide and another 1.6 million indirect jobs has been cut in half.^{xv}

Declining Value

- Unwanted horses, which in the past could have been sold for harvesting, will now become a cost to the horse owner as he/she would be required to dispose of the horse in some other way. The effect of the loss in revenue is compounded by the additional expense for disposal of the horse.
- One study estimated that following the ban, the annual decrease in value for horses that would have been processed in the U.S. would be between \$19.7 and \$28.8 million.^{xvi}
- The closure of domestic horse slaughtering facilities significantly and negatively affected lower to medium priced horses by 8 to 21 percent.^{xvii}

Current Legislation

- In the 2014 Agriculture Appropriations Bill, the federal restrictions on funding of meat inspectors for equine harvesting plants were reapplied. This restriction was not in the 2012 Agriculture Appropriation Bill and consequentially several equine harvesting facilities, now unable to be utilized, were constructed.
- In January 2014 U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) introduced an amendment striking the provision of the bill that prohibits the federal inspection of horse slaughter plants.^{xviii} This amendment was struck down, but Inhofe plans to introduce a separate amendment for the same purpose.^{xix}
- May 8th, 2015 the John Rainey Memorial Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act was introduced in Congress. This Act prohibits the export of U.S. horse meat, as well as horses bound for slaughter in another country for human consumption. The ban was previously proposed in 2013.^{xx}

ⁱ American Horse Council. Unwanted Horse Coalition. (2009). *Unwanted Horses Survey*. Lexington, KY.

ⁱⁱ Illinois Farm Bureau. (2015). *Equine Agriculture. Policy resolutions* (p. 55&56). Bloomington, IL.

ⁱⁱⁱ American Horse Council. Unwanted Horse Coalition. (2009). *Unwanted Horses Survey*. Lexington, KY.

^{iv} American Association of Equine Practitioners. (2010). *The Unwanted Horse and H.R. 503/S. 727: An Equine Veterinary Perspective*. AAEP.org. Online.

^v Ahren, J.J., et al. (2006). *The unintended consequences of a ban on the humane slaughter (processing) of horses in the United States*. Colorado Springs, CO.

^{vi} Smiley, Jane. (2009, May 1). Why horse slaughter is necessary. The New York Times. *TheRail.Blogs.NYTimes.com*. Online.

^{vii} Holcomb, K.E.; Stull, C.L.; Kass, P.H. "Unwanted horses: The role of nonprofit equine rescue and sanctuary organizations." *Journal of Animal Science* Volume 88 no.12. (2010): Pages(4142-4150). Web.

^{viii} American Horse Council. Unwanted Horse Coalition. (2009). *Unwanted Horses Survey*. Lexington, KY.

^{ix} American Veterinary Medical Association. *H.R. 503/ S. 727 The Prevention of Equine Cruelty Act of 2009*. AVMA.org. Online.

^x American Horse Council. Unwanted Horse Coalition. (2009). *Unwanted Horses Survey*. Lexington, KY.

^{xi} Illinois Department of Agriculture. 2015.

^{xii} United States Government Accountability Office. (2011). *Horse Welfare: Action Needed to Address Unintended Consequences from Cessation of Domestic Slaughter*.

^{xiii} Animal Welfare Council. (2013, May 14). *Passage of H.R. 1094 and S. 541 Would Further Increase Equine Abandonment and Neglect*.

^{xiv} Cowan, Tadlock. Congressional Research Service. (2013). *Horse Slaughter Prevention Bills and Issues*.

^{xv} BEEF. (2010, May 7). *Some talking points on horse slaughter*. BeefMagazine.com.

^{xvi} Ahren, J.J., et al. (2006). *The unintended consequences of a ban on the humane slaughter (processing) of horses in the United States*. Colorado Springs, CO.

^{xvii} United States Government Accountability Office. (2011). *Horse Welfare: Action Needed to Address Unintended Consequences from Cessation of Domestic Slaughter*.

^{xviii} Aubrey, Allison. "Congress Blocks Slaughtering Horses For Meat in U.S." NPR, 17 January 2014. Online.

^{xix} James M. Inhofe Press Release. *Inhofe Introduces Amendment to Allow Horse Slaughter Plants*. 16 January 2014.

^{xx} *Bills to Ban Horse Slaughter Introduced in Congress*. Food Safety News. 9 May 2015. Online.