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Horse Slaughter and Welfare

Each year tens of thousands of horses are slaughtered for human consumption, mainly in Alberta. Many of these horses come from the United States. Recently the United States has prohibited the slaughter of horses for human consumption in that country. The immediate result of that legislation is that more horses are being exported to both Canada and Mexico where slaughter for human consumption is allowed.

In 2008 (the last year for which we have statistics) the U.S. Government reports that 77,073 horses were sent to Canada for slaughter. The majority of these horses come into Canada via Lethbridge, Alberta and are taken to the horses slaughter house in Fort McLeod, Alberta. A lesser number of horses go to plants in Manitoba and Quebec.

The majority of these horses have been exposed to a very long journey, by road, before they reach the U.S./Canadian border and are then trucked to equine feedlots where they are held until slaughter. Many of these horses will spend months, if not years, waiting in these feedlots to be sent for slaughter. The conditions in these feedlots vary depending on the length of time the horses are kept and the weather that the horses have to endure since there is no shelter provided.

A new cause for concern is that the horses exported from U.S. to Canada may have been treated with drugs that may harm human consumers. This concern has prompted the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to announce that horse slaughter houses must begin taking new precautions, effective April 2010. Each horse must be now accompanied by complete health records showing that the horse has not been given any drug dangerous to humans or if the record is not available the horses must be quarantined for 6 months prior to slaughter.

Obviously complying with this new requirement will add considerably to the cost of holding the animal for slaughter and which would allow the meat to be sold for human consumption.

More important from the animal welfare point of view is the care they are given and the conditions under which they are kept whilst in quarantine. On the other hand the cost of this new treatment will greatly reduce the profitability for U.S. horse owners who send horses to Canada and it may well be that the number of horses we which we receive from the U.S. will be greatly reduced.

In 2006 the U.S. Government introduced legislation which prohibited U.S.D.A. Inspectors from inspecting horse slaughter plants in the U.S. which resulted in the closure of the last three U.S. horse slaughter houses.

This legislation was confirmed in 2009 by the President of the U.S. However, under pressure from the commercial horse breeding industry, the Government has also introduced funding for a formal investigation of the impact of the prohibition of horse slaughter houses in the U.S.

The new study will *“investigate the state of horse welfare in America as it relates to the end of the domestic slaughter industry. The study will specifically examine how horse welfare, horse rescue organizations, farm industry income and overall horse sales (imports and exports) have been affected by the slaughter house closures”*.

Farm Animals Die in Barn Fires



A barn fire in Adjala/Tosorontio on New Year’s Eve left hundreds of sheep, cattle, lambs, hens and the family dog dead. The owner of the barn said *“the fire spread quickly. Within minutes it was through the barn”*.

The fire chief for Adjala/Tosorontio, Mr. Paul Wales said *“that investigators are still looking into the cause of the fire but it was already fully engulfed when we got on the scene. The barn was totally destroyed”*.

This is only the latest of a series of barn fires that have occurred this year and will continue to happen throughout the year. Unfortunately there is no one single authority that can legislate the construction of barns in such a way as to discourage the start of the fire and the spread.

It seems clear that the most effective way of discouraging barn fires and the loss of farm animal life would be for insurance companies to require, as a condition of insuring the barn, that the barn meet certain standards. CanFACT has developed an extensive report on this issue which is available to any group or individual who may wish to see it.

In addition, CanFACT has been in touch with the Insurance Bureau of Canada suggesting that this authority could play a prominent role in reducing the loss of animal life in barns.

For more information and details of our recommendations please contact CanFACT.