

Horse slaughter dream a financial nightmare

"Natural Valley Farms died the day the decision makers chose to kill horses"

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The dream of the AQHA (American Quarter Horse Association) and its affiliate the MQHA (Montana Quarter Horse Association) to bring horse slaughter back to the United States may have just been dealt what may be its death blow.

The blow came not from anti-slaughter advocates, nor public revulsion, nor Congress, but from a horse slaughter industry insider whose op-ed, Meat plant: a cautionary tale, appeared on April 30th in the Western Producer, a subscription-only Canadian online animal agriculture journal.

"Natural Valley Farms died the day the decision makers chose to kill horses", says Henry Skjerven, an investor and director of the defunct Natural Valley Farms (NVF) slaughter complex in Saskatchewan, Canada. Skjerven tells the story of how NVF, which had originally been built to process cattle during the BSE crisis, ended in a \$42 million financial disaster following its decision to kill horses for the Velda Group of Belgium.

The story broke just as the AQHA and Stan Weaver of the MQHA, were celebrating the passage of Montana bill (HB 418).

On April 5, EWA broke the news that the plant had been closed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) in December. In his article, Skjerven refers to the plant's confrontational interaction with the CFIA over the plant's "composting" and other issues. Unlike beef that can be used in pet food, horse byproducts must be disposed of properly because they contain substances such as the wormer, Ivermectin, which can cause fatal encephalitis in some breeds of dogs.

Blood disposal appears to have been equally problematic for NVF as with other horse slaughter plants. Not only do horses have twice the quantity of blood as cows, but the blood is notoriously difficult to treat. The bacterial agents used in standard cattle digesters fail to provide acceptable discharge levels because of antibiotics often found in horse blood. As a result, pollution follows the horse slaughter industry where ever it goes.

During debate over HB 418, the Montana Senate Agriculture committee dismissed evidence of these problems as anti-slaughter propaganda. Even the testimony of former Kaufman, Texas mayor Paula Bacon was ignored when she told of blood rising into people's bathtubs in her town. But unfortunately for NVF, the CFIA was not so easily assuaged.

Even Butcher has admitted that any horse slaughter plant that is built in the US will have to be operated by an EU group like Velda because the horse meat market is in Europe and they control it. Now Velda needs a new home, but in his op-ed Skjerven, says, "horse slaughter never brought a single minute of profitability to the company."

In the end, it may not matter that HB 418 is unconstitutional, nor that a horse slaughter plant in the US could not export its horse meat without USDA inspectors, nor that the industry has committed a thousand sins against horses and the environment. If investors in a horse slaughter plant cannot be comfortable in knowing they will make a profit, there will be no plant built.

If Stan Weaver and the AQHA want horse slaughter they may have to do the killing themselves.

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