

COMMITTEE: AGRICULTURE AND ENERGY

POLICY: HORSE INDUSTRY

**TYPE OF POLICY: DRAFT POLICY SUBMITTED BY
 REPRESENTATIVE DAVE SIGDESTAD &
 REPRESENTATIVE SUE WALLIS**

In recent years, the processing of horses has become a controversial and emotional issue and has resulted in the closing of the last horse processing facility in the United States. Federal legislation has been introduced to amend the 1970 Horse Protection Act to prohibit the possession, sale, transport or shipping of horses for processing. The National Conference of State Legislatures urges members of Congress to oppose such legislation.

The loss of secondary markets has decimated the equine industry, severely impacted the livestock industry as a whole, and by eliminating the salvage value of horses has significantly reduced the market value of all horses. The loss of markets for horse meat for pet food, for the maintenance of zoo animals, and for byproducts has greatly impacted these sectors. The loss of horse products for export has eliminated more than \$42 million dollars of direct income for an already struggling sector of the livestock industry, not to mention millions of dollars in indirect costs because of the loss of value of individual animals.

The loss of the highly regulated and humane processing facilities in the United States has overwhelmed the ability of government and private rescue organization's ability to deal with the scope of the problem; and has overburdened state and local agencies charged with regulating the transfer, transport, and welfare of horses. Without affordable and economic alternatives, unwanted horses are abandoned, and in the Western US the additional pressure on public lands from horses turned out to run wild is only intensifying the over-population, over-grazing, and ultimate destruction of the ecosystem. State livestock programs that used to be able to recoup the costs of caring and feeding for abandoned and estray animals by marketing them, are now forced to greatly increase their budgets at the expense of taxpayers.

The Horse Welfare Coalition estimates that in excess of 100,000 unwanted horses annually, without any market value whatsoever, will be exposed to potential abandonment and neglect because of the cessation of horse processing in the United States. Efforts to prohibit the transport and export of horses can only exacerbate this problem. These additional unwanted horses will compete for adoption with the 32,000 wild horses that are currently fed and sheltered at a public expense of \$40 million. The nation's inadequate and overburdened horse rescue and adoption facilities cannot begin to handle the influx of additional unwanted and abandoned horses.

In the United States the harvest of all animals, including horses, is highly regulated to provide for the humane handling of the animals as well as for a safe and wholesome product. Horse processing in the United States is particularly tightly regulated, and the horse is the only animal whose transportation to processing is regulated. Horse processing facilities in the United States are required to have United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) veterinarians supervise the euthanasia, and the euthanasia method is humane, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association and the United States Department of Agriculture. Since the closing of horse processing facilities in the United States, horses have increasingly been sent across the borders for processing. In 2007, 35,000 horses were sent to Canada for slaughter, a forty-one percent increase from the previous year, while horse exports to Mexico have more than tripled. Equine processing in many foreign facilities is not held to the standards for humane handling and euthanasia required in the United States and often involves practices that would not be tolerated in this country.

The majority of world cultures, including French speaking Canada, and Mexico, most of Europe and Asia have provided a willing market for the US horse industry. These, and ethnic markets inside the US would appreciate an additional source of high quality protein untainted by disease concerns of other species of livestock.

NCSL urges Congress to oppose legislation that would restrict the market, transport, processing, or export of horses, to recognize the need for humane horse processing facilities in the United States, and not to interfere with State efforts to establish facilities in the United States.