



Hot EQUINE ISSUES

Horse Processing in Canada —

How U.S. horses are treated that go north to slaughter

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The province of Alberta, Canada, is directly north of the western half of Montana and has a population of about 3.5 million people. The largest cities in Alberta are Edmonton, the capital, and Calgary. There is one large horse slaughter facility in Alberta. In addition to Canadian horses, it processes horses that come across the border from the U.S.

“We’re happy to have a slaughter plant in Alberta. It’s a viable way to create a value for all horses,” says Les Burwash, Manager of Horse Programs, Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development. About 50,000 horses per year are processed through that one plant, he told RMR.

Burwash says that if Alberta did not have a horse slaughter industry, a significant portion of horses would have no or negative value.

“We have strong regulations for all livestock going to slaughter, including making the process as humane as possible,” he explains. “All plants are federally inspected by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency — every plant, every day. They are

also charged with enforcing humane treatment at those plants.

“We don’t have strong opposition to horse slaughter [in Canada], mostly due to good regulations and a culture that accepts horse meat as being okay to eat. Many horses are bred, raised and fed just for the slaughter industry — and their meat is a significant export product.”

In addition to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (the equivalent of the USDA), the province of Alberta has a unique **Livestock Protection System** for all livestock, including horses going to slaughter, that was put into place in 2006.

The System is a partnership between the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), which is not affiliated with any other humane agency inside or outside of Alberta; Alberta Agriculture and Food; the Alberta Farm Animal Care Association; the Canadian Food Inspection



Agency; and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Alberta has “third-party” inspectors: eight SPCA Peace Officers who are appointed by the Solicitor General and Minister of

Public Security, and paid for by a grant from the government, to enforce provincial statutes on animal welfare.

“We can respond to complaints of abuse or conduct inspections at horse feedlots, holding facilities like auction marts or exhibitions, and horse transport problems, such as making sure horses are not being transported in double-decker trailers,” explains SPCA Peace Officer Morris Airey, Director of Alberta Animal Protection Services.

One officer is assigned to monitor transportation and handling of livestock throughout the province.

“We have a three-way contractual agreement with Alberta Farm Animal Care and the

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Provincial Government. We meet regularly to work on any problems.”

Airey says that his agency responds to rural animal complaints in Alberta — about 50% are complaints about livestock, and about 30% of all complaints concern horses.

“People think of horses more as companion animals and so they are more inclined to report abuse or neglect of them than other livestock,” says Airey.

Two main laws protect animals from abuse and neglect in Alberta — the **Animal Protection Act** and the **Criminal Code of Canada**. Both protect horses being transported to slaughter, while they are at feedlots, and during the slaughter process.

The **Animal Protection Act** states that everyone who owns or looks after an animal in Alberta must:

- (a) ensure that the animal has adequate food and water;
- (b) provide the animal with adequate care when the animal is wounded or ill;
- (c) provide the animal with reasonable protection from injurious heat or cold;
- (d) provide the animal with adequate shelter, ventilation and space.

SPCA Peace Officers are proactive and need not wait for an offense to take action on a complaint. Under the way the

law is written, they may take an animal into custody if they have reason to believe that an owner or caretaker is not likely to care for the animal, thus ensuring an animal does not become in distress.

The SPCA explains that by placing the duties of an animal owner or care provider in positive terms, it defines the responsibilities of an animal owner, and it is much easier to see that an animal is not being given water to drink than to show that it is in distress from dehydration.

Airey adds that the Animal Protection Act carries stiff penalties — much stiffer than the federal criminal code — up to \$20,000 in fines, and a judge may deny ownership for life of any or all species of animals after conviction.

The **Criminal Code of Canada** anti-cruelty law prohibits anyone from willfully causing or permitting unnecessary pain, suffering or injury to an animal or bird; by willful neglect causing damage or injury to animals or birds while they are being driven or conveyed; and who willfully neglects or fails to provide suitable and adequate food, water, shelter and care. A conviction brings a fine of up to \$2,000 and/or six months in jail. The court may also prohibit the accused from owning or having custody of a species of animal or bird for up to two years.

