



DORIS DAY ANIMAL LEAGUE

HORSE ADVOCATES SEEK EMERGENCY INJUNCTION TO BLOCK NEW USDA HORSE SLAUGHTER SCHEME

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

Liz Ross/DDAL, liz@ddal.org, 202-546-1761

WASHINGTON (Feb. 23, 2006) – A coalition of animal protection groups last night filed a motion for a temporary restraining order here in federal court to prevent the U.S. Department of Agriculture from carrying out a plan to allow American horses to be slaughtered for human consumption in Europe and Asia, despite a recent federal law banning the use of tax dollars to facilitate horse slaughter. The law is scheduled to go into effect March 10.

Today's motion and supporting papers include statements from a former USDA inspector and state veterinarian for Vermont, other experts, and dozens of neighbors of the three operating slaughter plants who suffer from reduced property values, the pervasive stench, and the horror of seeing and hearing horses unloaded and slaughtered for human food. The groups seek a temporary ban on implementation of the "fee-for-service" scheme while the Court decides the merits of plaintiffs' legal case against the USDA.

In today's filing, the coalition points out that the USDA's fee-for-service scheme not only circumvents Congress' intent in enacting the recent ban on commercial horse slaughter, but also violates the Federal Meat Inspection Act's requirement that the agency, not private parties, pay the cost of inspection in order to ensure that inspectors are not beholden to the industries they're hired to monitor. The groups have also challenged the USDA's decision to implement this plan with no advance notice and public comment.

"Americans don't eat horses and we don't raise them for people in other countries to eat either," said Holly Hazard, executive director for the Doris Day Animal League. "Our lawmakers understand this, which is why Congress voted clearly and overwhelmingly to halt horse slaughter."

"The USDA's back-door maneuvering to keep the horse slaughter industry open for business when Congress expressly intended to shut it down is a blatant abuse of executive power and an outright violation of federal law," said Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States. "Clearly, the need for court action is in order, and until a decision is reached, the slaughter of American horses must be suspended."

The bipartisan Congressional effort to de-fund horse slaughter inspections was overwhelmingly passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 269 to 158 and in the Senate by a vote of 69 to 28.

"There is a growing frustration among the public and members of Congress with this blatant disregard for a law overwhelming passed by Congress and signed into law by the president," said Chris Heyde, SAPL deputy legislative director. "The U.S. Congress clearly responded to the American public's demand for an end to slaughter, and the USDA is choosing to violate this act to shelter three foreign owned slaughterhouses."

The coalition—including The Humane Society of the United States, Animal Welfare Institute, The Fund for Animals, Society for Animal Protective Legislation, Doris Day Animal League, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and American Humane Association—filed suit against the USDA earlier this month after the agency announced it will allow three foreign-owned slaughterhouses to continue killing tens of thousands of horses each year, despite the Congressional ban. Two of the plants are in Texas – Fort Worth-based Beltex Corp. and Dallas Crown, Inc. based in Kaufman. The third plant, Cavel International Inc., is based in DeKalb, Ill.

Horsemeat is not sold or consumed in the United States, yet an estimated 90,000 American horses are slaughtered in this country for food or shipped to Canada or Mexico for the same purpose every year. The meat from former racehorses, family ponies and other horses is frozen, packed and exported for human consumption in European and Japanese restaurants.

"Americans value horses as a symbol of the American heritage of freedom, not a commodity to serve European palates," said Ed Sayres, ASPCA president and CEO.

The groups have highlighted the need for a permanent ban on horse slaughter for food and are working actively for passage of H.R. 503 and S. 1915, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, introduced by U.S. Representatives John Sweeney (R-NY), John Spratt (D-SC), Ed Whitfield (R-KY), and Nick Rahall (D-WV) in the House, and U.S. Senators John Ensign (R-NV) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA) in the Senate.

The plaintiffs are represented in the case by Meyer Glitzenstein & Crystal, a public interest law firm in Washington, D.C.

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Suite 100 • 227 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002 • 202/546-1761

Email: info@ddal.org • www.ddal.org