

The great horse slaughter proxy war

The recent Bulletin article “Horses abandoned after slaughter plants closed” looked suspiciously like an LMA (Live Stock Managers Association) press release, and it contained many of their claims and quotes. Unfortunately that document and the article contained gross inaccuracies.

The story claimed that there were increased reports of abandoned horses following the closings of the three US based horse slaughter plants. There have indeed been more stories about abandoned horses, but not more horses being abandoned. A group of us working with the Animal Law Coalition researched the recent abandoned horse stories in detail. The report, called *Deleting the Fiction*, contains extensive documentation and can be found easily by entering its name into any search engine.

The investigation found that the reports were all either highly distorted or completely fabricated. Consider just a few examples. The hundreds of horses reported by an AP basketball stringer as being abandoned on a reclaimed Eastern Kentucky strip mine were in fact privately owned by Trish Hayes operator of the Breaks Riding stables in Virginia. They were simply being wintered there. Incredibly, AP ran that story only a month after running another story about the same horses being shot by two teenagers and explaining who the horses belonged to!

Likewise, a police report shows that a story in the Oregonian reporting nine horses abandoned on the farm of a Mr. McKenzie was untrue and that there had been only one horse which had been reported by McKenzie’s grand daughter. The police report concluded even that sighting was unfounded. The report further debunks one story after another clearly pointing to an intentional propaganda campaign.

Worse, the entire premise that the closing of the slaughter plants has led to anything at all is false. The closings caused only a 14% dip in slaughter last year while the plants moved their operations to Canada and Mexico. In January, the USDA reported we exported 9,944 horses to slaughter, just 31 horses fewer than we slaughtered the previous January (before the first plants were closed). Since we are slaughtering just as many of our horses, there can be no effect.

Of course, this is not about horse welfare. The very idea that the Livestock Managers Association, a meat producer group, would be concerned about the welfare of our horses is preposterous. The agriculture industry sees this as a proxy war between themselves and the animal rights community. The truth is that most of the opposition to horse slaughter comes from a highly organized grass roots community of horse lovers, not a vegan army bent on taking away people’s hamburgers. I know, I have been part of that community for six years.

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