



On the Edge of Common Sense

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Continuing Saga of Abandoned Horses

I had a visit with the president of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) recently about the abandoned horse issue. My question to him was ‘Since the problem is a direct result of the banning of equine slaughter plants, for which his group led the charge, what are they willing to do to help those of us who have inherited the responsibility for the mess they have made.’

We discussed the woefully inadequate plan to put them in ‘refuges’. We both agreed that euthanasia is not a bad thing, but dumping your unwanted horse along the roadside, in private pastures, or on park land to die of starvation is not humane.

We considered having equine animal shelters, like dog pounds. Maybe one in every state that would accept horses at no charge, hold them for thirty days in hopes they could be adopted, then euthanasia. The facility should include a free pick-up service, a large ‘feedlot’ to hold them, and a rendering plant. He did not readily agree that his group would finance this national program. But they are the richest animal rights group in the world and what better way, I thought, to put their money where their convictions are.

The HSUS has made legitimate criticism of how some horses destined for distant slaughter plants in Canada and Mexico are transported. We livestock people are responsible for the animals in our care from conception until death. We cannot turn a blind eye to double decked trucks, too long hauls and mistreatment. The Department of Transportation or Agriculture should have laws that guarantee the horses’ well being. We should ensure their enforcement.

It’s good that we are talking, but this winter the public’s awareness of the problem, and their deeper understanding of the cause seems to be lifting the veil of the ignorance which often blinds the naive but well-meaning, be they horse lovers, politicians or journalists. Starving horses are not a pretty sight.

Three states, with more to come, North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana are taking steps to examine the construction of horse slaughter plants to replace the ones the animal righters have had banned in Texas and Illinois. The day these new plants open up, the abandoned horse problem, with all its unintended abuse, will disappear. There would be a place for them to go.

There are several groups scrabbling around for answers this cold winter to save unwanted horses from the misjudgment of these well-intentioned but irresponsible ‘animal lovers.’ I hear from them regularly. I suggest if you are one of these sale barn operators, ranchers, park rangers, farmers or rural residents who have inherited the problem, take photos of the horses, good or bad, that have been dumped in your area. Then when a new state applies for a permit to build a new horse slaughter plant and the animal rights group protest, we will have an entire ‘Gallery of Abandoned Horses’ to show the public the inhumanity of their policy. These photos would be very convincing. Our facts versus their perception. Of course, we could put pictures of abandoned horses on milk cartons with the caption “Brought to you by HSUS, PETA and the “Frenchmen Should Not Eat Horsemeat Society!”