

## Investigation at **Natural Valley Farms** Horse Slaughter Plant Neudorf, Saskatchewan External Report

### 1. General Information

#### **Location:**

Natural Valley Farms  
Neudorf, Saskatchewan  
(306) 748-2477  
(306) 748-2286 fax  
[www.naturalvalley.ca](http://www.naturalvalley.ca)  
(their website has been removed from internet)

#### **Mailing Address:**

523 Garnet Street  
Wolseley, Saskatchewan  
S0G 5H0

#### **Plant Manager:**

Mr. Cam Taylor

#### **President /Livestock Manager:**

Mr. Ken Pillar



Horse head partially buried

Natural Valley Farms has a horse slaughterhouse in Neudorf, Saskatchewan with a processing facility in Wolseley, SK. The plant slaughters approximately 200 horses per day, 5 days a week.

### 2. History:

On a visit to the facility on 26/09/07 Animals' Angels Canada inspectors discovered a large pit where rendering remains of horses and cattle were being dumped. Upon closer inspection it was noticed that captive bolt pistol holes were missing in the heads of many of the horses, yet they appeared to have been butchered for their meat. When management was asked about the method of killing they stated that all horses are killed with a captive bolt pistol, yet the remains of these horses show differently.



The inspectors returned to the rendering pit again on 02/10/07 and were able to inspect new horse heads. Again, many were missing captive bolt pistol holes.

Animals' Angels Canada placed a call to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Humane Slaughter Specialist alerting them to the concerns. The CFIA conducted an announced audit and inspected the brains of two horses whom they had just observed being killed with the captive bolt pistol. Both were found to be in compliance with the Humane Slaughter Act. However, this does not explain why the heads in the rendering pit lacked captive bolt pistol holes. The Humane Slaughter Specialist stated that an on-going investigation was being conducted by the CFIA as the number of losses (horses arriving dead or dying in the rear holding pens) at the plant was unacceptably high.

## **2. History cont'd:**

On 16/11/07 Animals' Angels Canada sent a follow up letter with the concerns, complete will unedited photos taken of the heads in the rendering pit, to management of the plant requesting an explanation for the missing holes. To date, no reply has been received.

On 10/12/07 the concerns regarding the environmental impact of the three large rendering pits was shared with the Saskatchewan government. The Department stated that Natural Valley Farms has a permit for composting, however the carcasses, heads and organs were not in compliance with regulations, as they were not covered with a composting material such as sawdust or straw.

## **3. Observations:**

### **26/02/08**

In an attempt to determine the name of the brand the horse- meat is sold under Canadian Horse Defense Coalition inspectors went to the Wolseley processing plant. The names on the sides of the refrigerated trailers on the property were Cavel International, Roberge and Jay's, however the majority of the trailers were white with no brand name on them.

We drove to Neudorf to the horse slaughterhouse and located the large rendering pit we had visited in September and October. Viewed from a distance the pit was now surrounded by a massive berm that appeared to be composed of dirt, but on closer inspection was comprised of thousands of dead horses and cows.



We observed a dump truck from the plant arriving and dumping the fresh remains of horses that had just been slaughtered. The piles of warm heads, organs and limbs steamed in the cold.

We approached the dumping area and were shocked to see the enormity of it. It was at least four times the size it was in September/October and now completely comprised of horses. Little to no cattle remains were found. The piles had been sorted and some were labelled. Straw was scattered over 2 of the piles – the internal organ pile and another that was indistinguishable.

**Directly behind the largest berm was an deceased foal. His internal organs had been scavenged by coyotes but his ears had been cut off with a knife at the plant. The left side of his head and neck bore tire track marks meaning he was run over close to the time of his death (likely by a bobcat cleaning up the slaughterhouse floor).**



### 3. Observations cont'd:

26/02/08

Behind the foal was a very deep pit that the full bodies of at least four horses were dumped into. These horses bore no captive bolt pistol wounds and because they were still intact were likely dead on arrival, thus their carcasses condemned.

One of the horses in this pit still had a USDA sticker attached to his back. The number was 7995 and the sticker was white, indicating that this horse was misleadingly labelled as a “feeder” horse rather than a “slaughter” horse.



Two very large pits had been dug and filled with horse heads and limbs in varying stages of decomposition. As on our earlier inspections it was clear these heads had been processed. We examined five heads from these piles. Four of the five we documented again DID NOT bear captive bolt pistol holes.



Fresh horse head – no captive bolt pistol hole



Desiccated horse head – no captive bolt pistol hole

**3. Observations cont'd:**

**26/02/08**



Horse head – no captive bolt pistol hole



Horse head – no captive bolt pistol hole



One of the inside hills – at least 9 horse heads visible

### 3. Observations cont'd:

**26/02/08**



Disarticulated horse leg and bones



Horse internal organ piles covered in straw

Back at the slaughterhouse, at approximately 7:00 pm, two double-decker trailers loaded with American horses arrived at the plant and unloaded. The company names on the trucks and the license plates marked them as being from Colorado. We believe these were horses purchased by Charles Carter – a large horse kill buyer in the United States.

**27/02/08**

We spoke with a private source on this day who told us the slaughterhouse has a feedlot approximately 4 ½ miles from the plant. Rather than loading the horses onto trailers to take them to slaughter, we were told the horses were run to the facility to be killed.

#### 4. Areas of Concern:

1. Transportation of pregnant mares too close to term. The transportation of a pregnant mare too close to term is illegal in both Canada and the US. The conditions of this foal's birth cannot be certain – the foal may have been spontaneously aborted – on the truck en route to slaughter, in the rear holding area or on the kill floor itself. He may have been birthed vaginally or he may have been cut out. The bruising on his head indicates that he was alive when he was born. If he was born alive, did he die naturally before his ears were removed? There was no captive bolt pistol hole on his head. The illegal transportation of pregnant mares too close to term was a routine violation at Cavel, the horse slaughterhouse in DeKalb, Illinois whose parent company is now part owner of Natural Valley Farms.
2. “Feeder” vs “Slaughter” labelling. It has been suspected for some time that owners/shippers in the US have been making use of a loophole in the US Commercial Transport of Equines to Slaughter Act that dictates that any horse labelled as “slaughter” being exported to Canada MUST be inspected by the CFIA officials at the border to ensure the humane transport of that horse. However we documented the import of horses at the Coutts/Sweetgrass border on 20/09/07 and spoke with the Customs Broker who told us horses were no longer being inspected as they were coming in labelled as “feeder” horses – horses destined for feedlots, rather than slaughter. We received similar information at the Portal/North Portal border in Saskatchewan on this investigation. We suspected this was the shipper/haulers way of avoiding even the minimal welfare checks in place on slaughter-bound horses. This suspicion was confirmed when we saw a horse who had arrived at the plant dead and who was thrown into the condemned pile with his “feeder” sticker still attached.
3. The continuing lack of holes in the heads of the horses. As on our visits in September and October, we again observed that the majority of horse heads were lacking captive bolt pistol holes, yet we were assured by management that this is the ONLY method of killing at the plant. We can only guess as to why this is: is it because the horses are so head-shy that the bolt is not penetrating their heads but the kill line is continuing so quickly (200 horses are killed a day) that the horses are being suspended by a rear leg and stabbed in the jugular while fully conscious? Is another method of killing that does not leave marks on the skull being used – for example, puntilla – as has been documented in Mexico? Puntilla involves jabbing a device similar to an icepick into the spinal cord of a horse. It does not render them unconscious but rather immobilizes them. The practice is illegal in Canada. Or do these horses represent the horses who arrived dead or died in the rear holding pens or at the company-owned-feedlot?
4. Horses arriving after dark. This is a concern as it is highly likely that no CFIA inspector is present to ensure the humane unloading of the horses – who are often transported on double-decker trailers from the United States meaning at least a 20 hour ride without food, water or a rest. If the plant is in fact experiencing a too-high dead-on-arrival rate and the CFIA is aware of this, no horses should be allowed to be unloaded without the presence of a CFIA inspector. Also, if the US Commercial Transport of Equines to Slaughter Act was being followed as it should be, these horses, who are slaughter-bound, are in fact to be unloaded in the presence of a CFIA inspector who is instructed to record the time and date of arrival of the animals. There is a \$5,000 fine for each horse not recorded by CFIA.
5. Driving record violations of US drivers. The trailers we observed arriving at the plant during the evening were US trailers owned by Charles Carter – a large kill buyer in the United States whose drivers have records of unsafe driving (a major accident in 2006, inadequate vehicle maintenance and falsifying driving records to name a few).
6. Running horses from feedlot. We were told the feedlot is 4 ½ kilometres from the plant. If these slaughter-bound horses, many of whom are health compromised, are being forced to run to the plant to their deaths it would take them over a half hour at full trot. This is unacceptable for horses who are injured, liming, ill, emaciated or fatigued as some of these horses are.
7. Continued allowance of double-decker trailers. Double-decker trailers clearly violate the federal Health of Animals Act governing transport of animals, yet they continue to be allowed in Canada. These unfit vessels have been prohibited for use in the US but are allowed if the destination on the driver's manifest is a slaughterplant.

## **5. Violations:**

### **1. US Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter**

#### **Letter of Intent with Canada**

“The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) at the border must:

- Verify that the accompanying original US health certificate is endorsed by a USDA veterinarian and for each horse identified on the certificate provide all information required by the Canadian Federal Health of Animals Regulations;
- This includes, verifying that a veterinarian inspected the animal within 30 days before it was exported to Canada and was found to be clinically healthy and fit to travel (VS Form 17-140);
- Determine the duration of transport by referring to the accomodating owner/shipper certificate;
- Provide veterinary inspection of the horses to verify that the horses are being transported humanely.”

“At the Destination Slaughter Plant CFIA must:

- Conduct a veterinary ante-mortem inspection on each horse prior to slaughter;
- Identify time and date of arrival of each truckload of US-origin horses.”

Assessment of civil penalties up to \$5,000 per animal violation

### **2. Federal Health of Animals Act**

#### **Part XII SICK, PREGNANT, AND UNFIT ANIMALS**

**138.(2)** Subject to subsection (3), no person shall load or cause to be loaded on any railway car, motor vehicle, aircraft or vessel and no one shall transport or cause to be transported an animal (a)that by reason of infirmity, illness, injury, fatigue or any other cause cannot be transported without undue suffering during the expected journey;

(b)if it is probable that the animal will give birth during the journey.

**138.(2.1)** For the purpose of paragraph (2)(a), a non-ambulatory animal is an animal that cannot be transported without undue suffering during the expected journey.

**138.(4)** No railway company or motor carrier shall continue to transport an animal that is injured or becomes ill or otherwise unfit for transport during a journey beyond the nearest suitable place at which it can receive proper care and attention.

#### **Part XII SEGREGATION**

**142.** No person shall transport or cause to be transported animals in a railway car, motor vehicle, aircraft or vessel unless

(a)each animal is able to stand in its natural position without coming into contact with a deck or roof.

#### **Part XII PROTECTION OF ANIMALS FROM INJURY OR SICKNESS**

**143.(1)** No person shall transport or cause to be transported any animal in a railway car, motor vehicle, aircraft, vessel, crate or container if injury or undue suffering is likely to be caused to the animal by reason of

(a)inadequate construction of the railway car, motor vehicle, aircraft vessel, container or any part thereof.

**5. Violations cont'd:**

**3. Meat Inspection Act – PART III**

**Examination, Inspection, Humane Treatment and Slaughter, Packaging and Labelling**

**62.(1)** No food animal shall be handled in a manner that subjects the animal to avoidable distress or avoidable pain.

**78.** No food animal, other than a bird or domesticated rabbit, shall be suspended for the purpose of slaughter unless, immediately before being suspended, it is rendered unconscious or killed by a method set out in section 79.

**79.** Every food animal that is slaughtered shall, before being bled,

(a) be rendered unconscious in a manner that ensures that it does not regain consciousness before death, by one of the following methods:

(i) by delivering a blow to the head by means of a penetrating or non-penetrating mechanical device in a manner that causes immediate loss of consciousness,

(ii) by exposure to a gas or a gas mixture in a manner that causes a rapid loss of consciousness; or

(iii) by the application of an electrical current in a manner that causes immediate loss of consciousness.

**80.** No equipment or instrument for restraining, slaughtering or rendering unconscious any food animal shall be used by any person for those purposes

(a) unless the person is, by reason of the person's competence and physical condition, able to do so without subjecting the animal to avoidable distress or avoidable pain; or

(b) where the condition of the equipment or instrument or the manner in which or the circumstances under which the equipment or instrument is used might subject the animal to avoidable distress or avoidable pain.

**4. Livestock Inspection and Transportation Regulations**

**Province of Saskatchewan**

**Criteria for livestock transportation vehicles**

**18(3)** (a) Where an upper deck is used on vehicles transporting livestock, the underside of the said upper deck shall at all times provide clear head room for all livestock standing in a natural position on the floor immediately below the said deck of the vehicle.

**Classes of livestock shall be separated during transit**

**21** Where horses, cattle, calves under 200 kg in weight, sheep, goats and swine, or two or more of such kinds of livestock are transported by a vehicle at the same time:

(b) crippled, injured, sick or disabled animals must be separated from other livestock by a partition;

(c) any animal that becomes crippled, injured, sick or disabled during transport, or that dies during transport, must be unloaded at the nearest stockyard for treatment or disposal at the vehicle owner's expense.

**All photos in this report have been unedited (but cropped for space). Original images and footage available upon request.**

**Investigation report provided by:**

Twyla Francois  
Central Region Director  
The Canadian Horse Defense Coalition

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