Lead Line

by Jason Turner, Extension Horse Specialist

On November 17, 2011, the US Congress passed a budget bill and President Obama signed it on November 18. This bill omitted a clause that had been included since 2006 that prohibited USDA from funding inspections on horse meat. Therefore, from a rule standpoint, USDA could conduct horse meat inspections at least until September 2012 when the statute expires. Since Thanksgiving, I have seen and heard unfounded reports of how “the slaughter ban” on horses has been lifted. While this may be wishful thinking for some, it is far from reality. On December 9, Phil Derfler, the Deputy Administrator for the Food Safety & Inspection Service, stated the following in a post on the USDA blog: “While Congress has technically lifted the ban, horse processing will not resume anytime in the near term. Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, horses are an amenable species, which means that horse meat cannot be shipped or sold for human consumption without inspection. To date, there have been no requests that the Department initiate the authorization process for any horse processing operation in the United States. In the two states where horse processing took place prior to the Congressional ban, Illinois and Texas, there are laws in place prohibiting the slaughter of horses. Even if these laws were changed, any processing facility will still need to satisfy a significant number of requirements, such as obtaining a federal grant of inspection, conducting a hazard analysis, and developing a Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points (HACCP) plan prior to the processing of any animals.”

So while there is an open window of opportunity for slaughter plants to open, The Horse magazine (http://www.thehorse.com/ViewArticle.aspx?ID=19216&src=top) reported that some states, such as Illinois, Texas, Oklahoma, and California, have state statutes that prevent equine slaughter facilities. So, don’t look for any of the plants that were operational in pre-2005 (Texas and Illinois) to be opened in the future.

In a June 2011 report the Government Accountability Office (GAO; http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-228) stated the number of US equines transported to Canada and Mexico from 2006-2010 had increased by 148 and 660%, respectively. This represents about 138,000 horses in 2010 compared to the 104,800 horses that were slaughtered in the US in 2006. While there is no statutory ban on horse slaughter at the federal level, the changes in federal inspection funding coupled with state bans on horse slaughter has had a dramatic effect on equine welfare. This is due to the distance that horses must be transported for slaughter in other countries as well as the impact on horse sale prices and the increasing demands placed on equine rescue facilities in the US. The case of neglected horses has even caused some previously staunch supporters of a slaughter ban to reconsider their position. In a November 30, 2011, interview in the Christian Science Monitor (http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2011/1130/Lifting-horse-slaughter-ban-Why-PETA-says-it-s-a-good-idea) the founder of PETA, Ingrid Newkirk, said the US should never have banned domestic horse slaughter. “It's quite an unpopular position we've taken,” Ms. Newkirk says. “There was a rush to pass a bill that said you can't slaughter them anymore in the United States. But the reason we didn't support it, which sets us almost alone, is the amount of suffering that it created exceeded the amount of suffering it was designed to stop.” This statement created a rift in the animal rights community, and PETA clarified their stance in comments on February 3, 2012 (http://www.peta.org/b/thepetafiles/archive/2012/02/...
While this is a controversial issue among equine owners, it is important that all equine owners, as well as the general public, are aware of the unintended consequences of the cessation of equine slaughter in the US—it simply has had a devastating impact on equine welfare and the economic future of the equine industry. In an effort to remain informed on this issue, I encourage you to review the legislation that is currently before the US Congress (H.R. 2966 and S. 1176; http://www.govtrack.us/congress/legislation.xpd). In this review you can see the status of the legislation, how it will impact the equine industry, and which states’ congressional members have co-sponsored the bill.

***************

SWCRS
Rancher’s Roundtable
January 11  Herd Health Planning
Southwest Center For Rangeland Sustainability

February 15
Reproduction and Heifer Development

March 14  Spring Nutrition and Poisonous Plants
April 11  Wildlife Habitat, Nutrition and Harvest

New location on the ranch!
Turn East on Torrance County CO20 (University Road) and travel 8 miles to ranch entrance, turn right, follow signs to SWCRS.

For more information and directions map check our website for a full yearly schedule!
http://Corona.nmsu.edu

Contact:
Shad Cox
575-849-1015
shadcox@nmsu.edu

Sponsored by:

New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator. NMSU and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.