



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

SEP 6 2006

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in reply to your request for a report on H.R. 503, a bill "To amend the Horse Protection Act to prohibit the shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling, or donation of horses and other equines to be slaughtered for human consumption, and for other purposes."

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that the bill, both as introduced and as amended, not be enacted.

H.R. 503 prohibits interstate commerce in horses and other equines to be slaughtered for human consumption. As amended, H.R. 503, among other things, would: limit the provisions of the bill to a pilot program prohibiting such commerce in New York and Kentucky; allow slaughter in existing facilities; exempt horses that will be processed for charitable or humanitarian purposes and horses that are owned or controlled by a State or local government or by an individual who purchased the horse from a State or local government; require the Secretary of Agriculture (Secretary) to pay compensation to an owner who incurs a monetary loss because the owner's horse could not be sold for slaughter; and require the Secretary to take ownership of unwanted horses.

USDA is opposed to H.R. 503 and all of the amendments for several reasons. First, the requirement that the Department take possession of unwanted horses would create a significant burden. Second, there is no existing funding mechanism to enable the Secretary to take ownership of unwanted horses, or to compensate horse owners for monetary losses because of a ban on horse slaughter. Third, H.R. 503 would restrict interstate commerce in horses intended for slaughter for human consumption and would reduce exports. Fourth, we do not believe that the Horse Protection Act, a law to prevent the soring of horses in the United States, should be amended to prohibit a completely different type of activity. Fifth, and most significantly, we have serious concerns that the welfare of these horses would be negatively impacted by a ban on slaughter.

Additionally, officials with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) report that each year approximately 100,000 horses are either slaughtered in the United States for export overseas for human consumption, or exported to Canada or Mexico for the same purpose. Due to injury, age, or other problems, these are unwanted horses whose owners obtain monetary profit for their slaughter. USDA already provides extensive regulation of 1) the transportation of

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horses intended for slaughter, and 2) the process used to slaughter the horses. Given these stringent regulations, we believe horse slaughter in the United States is a safe and humane practice; therefore, we do not support the amendment to H.R. 503 that would allow existing slaughter establishments to continue operating while preventing new establishments from opening.

Should horses no longer be able to go to slaughter, the welfare of the horses would be adversely affected. Some of these horses would likely be directed to horse rescue and retirement facilities in the United States. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) reports that existing facilities have a maximum capacity of approximately 6,000 horses. Placing additional horses in these facilities would lead to financial and operational strains, potentially leading to a decreased level of care provided to all horses at these facilities. Horse retirement facilities and sanctuaries are not regulated so there is no way to ensure the horses living there would receive adequate care.

If the slaughter of horses for human consumption were outlawed, there exists the chance that individuals would find other ways of moving these animals, either under false pretenses or covertly. Without the knowledge of their movement, APHIS would then be unable to regulate or even monitor the condition of these animals to ensure their safe travel conditions. There also exists the possibility that unwanted horses would be euthanized via methods not approved by the AVMA as humanely minimizing suffering to the animals.

In short, we believe that there is a significant probability that the enactment of this bill could result in a reduction in the humane treatment of horses.

The Secretary of Agriculture has developed guidelines for the regulation of horses and other equines being transported in commerce for slaughter. The regulations include requirements for food, water, and rest that must be provided to these equines, and the prohibition on the use of double-deck trailers and of commercial transport to slaughter of equines that are unfit for travel. APHIS' efforts, through both regulatory enforcement and education have shown increasing success. In FY 2005, APHIS initiated 109 cases, 67 involving technical violations and 42 humane transport issues. USDA's APHIS takes its responsibility to ensure the safe and humane transport of horses to slaughter very seriously.

In addition, the humane slaughter of horses is stringently regulated by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), as authorized by the Federal Meat Inspection Act. All FSIS livestock inspection program personnel are trained in humane handling, and understand that they are expected and obligated to take immediate enforcement action when a humane handling violation is observed.

Enactment of H.R. 503, as amended, would result in increased USDA outlays. USDA estimates that this bill, as amended, could require payments of up to \$40 million annually to affected horse

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owners for the New York and Kentucky pilot projects, and additional sums if the Secretary would have to take possession of unwanted horses.

The Office of Management and Budget advises that there is no objection to the presentation of this report from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Johanns', written in a cursive style.

Mike Johanns
Secretary