Promoting slaughtering of horses and consumption of horse meat

- *Ethical horse keeping and meat production*

Markku Saastamoinen
MTT Animal Production, Equines, Ypäjä, Finland
INRODUCTION

• Horse sector and **number of horses are increasing** – should we be happy with it?
• However, the useful life of the horse is limited - *what happens then?*
• There will be the time when horse owners have to part with their horses for some reason (old age, severe medical illness/injury, handling problems, poor economy)
• The end of the horse’s life is important and **the way to the end**, as well
• How to get rid of the horse ethically and ecologically, i.e. by an acceptable way?
• The alternatives are slaughtering or euthanasia at home stable/horse clinic
• When putting down with the latter way, the problem is what to do with the dead body
• The alternatives are *burial (where allowed), cremation, rendering, destruction* – all are expensive
• But are these ways acceptable by the society; are they sustainable, ecological, economical and ethic?

• Further, high costs may lead to abandoning of horses – there are lot of abandoned horses e.g. in UK and Ireland – this is a big welfare question

• In many areas there are limited alternative options for dealing with unwanted horses
• Appr. 5% of the population size is put down yearly; this means that in Europe 300 000 athletic and hobby horses are dead every year
• Of those about 20 to 30 % are slaughtered in their home countries
• The rest are transported to other countries or the bodies are destroyed
WHY SLAUGHTERING?

• It is ethical, economical and sustainable from the point of view of animal welfare and environment
• Human consumption is economic and ethical way to utilize the meat – other alternatives are waste of food
• The ecological foot print of horse meat is small
• It is economical to the horse owner
WHY DOMESTIC SLAUGHTERING?

• In many countries there is increasing demand of horse meat from customers

• However, the domestic supply of horses for slaughter is small; this leads to import of horse meat – people prefer domestic meat

• Transportations of the animals are much shorter – long transports through Europe are a well known problem
• Welfare during transportations and in slaughter facilities can be properly controlled
• Horses can utilize local land areas as feed that are not utilized by other animals – positive impact on biodiversity
EXAMPLE FROM U.S

• **U.S banned horse slaughtering** in 2007
• After that many animal welfare problems arose; horse owners have fewer options for getting rid of horses they longer want: high costs of feeding, caring, veterinary/medication

  → many horses are abandoned

• Affects negatively prices of lower-to-medium priced horses (8 to 21 %)
• Economical downturn same time
• The horse meat from Canada and Mexico are born and raised in the U.S; 140,000 live horses are exported to these countries each year from the U.S.

• The long transportations (to slaughterhouses or feedlots) of live animals is a big ethical and animal welfare question.

• Several states in U.S are seeking to reopen horse slaughter facilities.
ARE PEOPLE EATING HORSE MEAT?

• Horse has had an iconic role; its former importance as a work and transportation animal, “war hero”; today value as racing, recreation or show animal

• For many horses are “companion animals”

• However, the horse is a production/farm animal, a part of food chain, and working animal
• There are some countries/cultures, e.g. UK and Ireland where people do not eat horse meat

• In many countries this is based on Christian traditions; the pope Gregorius III banned horse meat eating in 732

• From the 15th century eating horse meat has been a tabu in Europe; this changed in late 1800’s because of lack of food and animal welfare reasons
• Consumers in some countries or areas traditionally have a strong preference for horse meat (e.g. in Italy)
“Horse meat scandal”

• Gave possibilities to show the positive aspects of horse meat and its human consumption
• Increased the demand of horse meat in some countries (e.g. Finland, Sweden)
• Increased the interest in domestic horse meat
• Some meat houses stopped to use horse meat (only minimal part in their products)
HORSE SLAUGHTERING AND HUMAN CONSUMPTION IN EU

• Each year over 200 000 horses are slaughtered for human consumption in the EU
• It is mainly low-priced horses that are more likely be bought for slaughter
• Nearly half of these horses are slaughtered in Italy
• The remainder are slaughtered primarily in Poland, Spain, France, Romania, Belgium, Germany
## Horses slaughtered for meat production 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1000 heads</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>99,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>39,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>26,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>17,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>10,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>9,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other EU members</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5,527</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Human Society International 2013)
• Due to the economic downturn number of slaughtered horses in Spain has doubled from year 2007
• Slower levels of horse slaughter are recorded in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg and other countries
• In the EU countries there are large number of slaughter houses registered to slaughter horses – in many countries they are spread quite equally
• In some countries the number of slaughtering facilities has increased
Slaughterhouses registered to slaughter horses within the European Economic Area

(2008)
• The largest horse meat consumer countries are Italy, France, Belgium; *consumption has decreased in many countries after 1970’s*
• Poland and Spain (+ Romania) are main exporters of horses and horse meet in the EU; also Germany, Denmark and The Netherlands are exporting
• Italy, France and Belgium are the largest importers of horse meat and live horses; *Belgium being a major importer from outside the EU*
• Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Uruguay are the exporters of horse meat to the EU

• For example, over 50 000 live horses are imported to Italy to be slaughtered there; long transports are a problem also in Europe
PROJECTS PROMOTING HORSE SLAUGHTERING AND HUMAN CONSUMPTION

• To horse owners, slaughterhouses, meat industry and consumers
• Focus on animal welfare, economy of horse keeping, quality and safety of horse meat
• Increase of supplying of horses for slaughter and human consumption of domestic horse meat
• Two projects/campaigns in Finland (1998, 2009) and one in Sweden (2012-2013); collaboration of horse breeding and owner associations, producers’ associations, ministry of agriculture

• In fact, the associations for animal welfare in Finland were established to promote human use of horse meat in 1901 (“first campaign”)
Conclusions of the projects:

• There are difficulties to get horses to be slaughtered
• Main problems are low price and sometimes long (expensive) transports
• All horses can not be slaughtered because of medication and insufficient medication recording
• Uneven supply for slaughter
• More expensive to handle than carcass of other species
• Horse has an important role in the feed chain
• People are interested in eating horse meat – the interest has increased during “the horse meat scandal” – there should be more supply (both horses to slaughtering and meat in the shops, restaurants)
• Customers want to buy domestic horse meat and horse meat products – not imported
• Human consumption of horse meat has economic and employment benefits to local communities (possibilities for small slaughter facilities)

• In addition, horse meat production may be important to protect old native heavy breeds (special products)
• More information is still needed re slaughter as an alternative to put down a horse

• *Proper use of horse passport, documentation of all medications and identification of the horse is the key factor to guarantee food safety and t confidence and growing demand of horse meat by meat industry and customers*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Proteins</th>
<th>Fat</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Iron</th>
<th>Sodium</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HORSE</td>
<td>22,6</td>
<td>2,6</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>4,8</td>
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<td>Pig</td>
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<td>26,6</td>
<td>311</td>
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<td>Sheep</td>
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<td>11,8</td>
<td>151</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calf</td>
<td>20,5</td>
<td>5,4</td>
<td>131</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>19,9</td>
<td>9,6</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>0,7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>18,1</td>
<td>17,2</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>38</td>
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