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**[Horse Lovers Sue USA Over Resumed Slaughter for Eating](http://www.courthousenews.com/2013/07/10/59233.htm)**

By ANGELA WATKINS

SAN FRANCISCO (CN) - The federal government's "nationwide program of horse slaughter" threatens the environment and public health, the Humane Society and others claim in court. Lead plaintiff Front Range Equine Rescue et al. sued Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and two of his top assistants, in Federal Court.

"Defendants are embarking on a nationwide program of horse slaughter that presents clear threats to the environment without complying with congressionally mandated requirements intended to protect the public and our natural resources," the complaint states. It continues: "The slaughter of American horses for human consumption presents unique and extensive dangers that have never been adequately considered by defendants, despite their obligations under NEPA [the National Environmental Policy Act].

"In 2007, Congress ended horse slaughter for human consumption in America, and there has been no program or policy for inspection of horse slaughter facilities in place since that time. In 2011, Congress appropriated funding for inspection of horse slaughter facilities, which necessitated a new set of plans, policies, and procedures for inspection of horse slaughter facilities by FSIS [the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service].

"For six years, from 2007 until the filing of this complaint, there has been no plan or policy for inspection of horses going to slaughter. For that entire time, horses were notably absent from any consideration of testing or inspection programs. Defendants have been modifying and supposedly improving their testing programs for slaughtered animals over the course of that time. But horses have been consistently excluded. Even USDA's 2013 National Residue Program for testing animals subject to slaughter, when the agency knew that horse slaughter was authorized, excluded horses from consideration."
The plaintiffs claim the USDA violated NEPA by failing to prepare environmental impact statements or assessment before granting applications for horse slaughter plants.

"At least six applications for horse slaughter inspections in five states have already been submitted to USDA since Congress appropriated funding for inspections," the complaint states. "These applications include: Valley Meat Co. LLC ('Valley Meat') located in Roswell, New Mexico; Responsible Transportation of Sigourney, Iowa; Rains Natural Meats of Gallatin, Missouri; American Beef Company/Unified Equine, LLC ('Unified Equine') of Rockville, Missouri; Trail South Meat Processing Co. ('Trail South') of Woodbury, Tennessee; and Oklahoma Meat Company of Washington, Oklahoma. In light of these applications, defendants have been developing new plans and programs, and a new set of policies with respect to the inspection of horse slaughter facilities.

"As set forth in this complaint, defendants have violated NEP A by failing to prepare an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment prior to granting inspection to horse slaughter plants located throughout the United States. Defendants' challenged actions authorize the resumption of slaughter of American horses for human consumption after six years without domestic horse slaughter. Defendants have taken this action notwithstanding USDA's obligations to comply with NEPA, and USDA's actual knowledge that horse slaughter causes significant environmental harms related specifically to the means and methods of horse slaughter, the potentially toxic nature of the waste generated by this industry, and the fact that horse meat endangers consumers."

The plaintiffs claim the slaughterhouse process often results in pollutants such as adulterated horse meat, horse blood, and horse parts contaminating water supplies. They claim that in once case a horse slaughterhouse contaminated water so badly that residents' faucets delivered blood and horse tissue.
They claim horses sent to slaughterhouses are kept in "deplorable, inhumane, and cruel conditions" and that they, the plaintiffs, must use the limited resources of their organizations to assist horses designated for slaughter.

And they claim the slaughtering of horses for human consumption is opposed by 80 percent of the U.S. public and contradicts the legislative intent of the 2006 Agricultural Appropriations Act.
They want the USDA enjoined from carrying out inspections at any horse slaughter facility until it complies with the NEPA and conducts a detailed review of the environmental effects of its decisions.
Plaintiffs include [Front Range Equine Rescue](http://www.frontrangeequinerescue.org/), the [Humane Society of the United States](http://www.humanesociety.org/), the [Marin Humane Society](http://www.marinhumanesociety.org/), [Horses for Life Foundation](http://www.horsesforlife.org/), [Return to Freedom](http://www.returntofreedom.org/), and five individuals. They are represented by Bruce Wagman with [Schiff Hardin](http://www.schiffhardin.com/) in San Francisco.

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On July 19th, 2013, a group of Native American leaders and the Foundation to Protect New Mexico Wildlife (founded by former Governor of NM, Bill Richardson and Robert Redford) joined as co-plaintiffs against the USDA. In addition, the State of New Mexico, led by its Attorney General, filed a motion to intervene against USDA for authorizing the beginning of horse slaughter without engaging in the proper environmental review. New Mexico seeks to become a plaintiff in this lawsuit to defend the State from the harms of horse slaughter.

**Press Releases:**

July 2, 2013 | [Joint Press Release on Lawsuit](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press_releases/2013/07/lawsuit-filed-to-block-horse-slaughter-070213.html)

July 22, 2013 | [Foundation to Protect New Mexico Wildlife](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CYL3%5CDesktop%5C072213%20NM%20Widlife%20Foundation%20Announcement%20PR.DOCX)

July 22, 2013 | [Office of the New Mexico Attorney General, Gary King](http://bit.ly/17yOhLl)

**Courthouse Docket:**

July 2, 2013: [Case Number 4:2013cv03034](http://dockets.justia.com/docket/california/candce/4%3A2013cv03034/267748/)