

Investigation of Mexican Horse Slaughter Plants approved for export to the European Union

Introduction:

The United States is the main supplier for horses slaughtered at EU approved plants in Mexico. Between January 1, 2012 and October 27, 2012 approximately 89,032 horses were exported from the US to Mexico for slaughter. (Source: USDA Market News Service).

The aim of the investigation was to determine conditions for horses during transport and slaughter and to compare these conditions with European standards. Animals' Angels already conducted investigations at Mexican slaughter plants in 2007 and 2008. During these investigations, poor conditions and inhumane treatment were documented. The goal of the 2012 investigation was to check if any improvement could be noticed.

The European Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) visited the plants with their investigators in June of 2012. Their assessment was *"The overall situation as regards official controls over the production of horse meat and meat products for exports to the EU as well as certification largely provides satisfactory assurances regarding compliance with, or equivalence to, EU requirements."* (Full length audit report can be found here: http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_inspection_ref=2012-6340)

However, the FVO visit was an announced inspection and all plants were notified in advance about the upcoming audit, which significantly limits the possibility of documenting the true conditions and handling.

9/18/12

Location:

Inter Meats, S.A. DE C.V.
 Avenida Universidad 602 Int. 19 Unidad Ganadera
 Aguascalientes, AGS. Mexico 20130

Examples of origin/shipment info for US horses arriving at this plant:

Owner/Shipper:	Location:	Distance to export pen:	Distance export pen to plant:
Dennis Kunz	Willard, Utah	1166 miles	660 miles
Dorian Ayache	Lebanon, TN	1268 miles	660 miles
Joe Simon	Perkins, OK	729 miles	660 miles
Triple Crown Ranch	Meeker, OK	711 miles	660 miles
Mike McBarron	Kaufman, TX	606 miles	660 miles
Ryon Simon	Cannon Falls, MN	1445 miles	660 miles
Dave Quinn	Gallop, NM	635 miles	660 miles

6:55am:

Investigators arrived at the Inter Meats plant together with 2 trucks they trailed the night before from the “Zoosanitaria” checkpoint where paperwork is checked within Mexico. The horses had been loaded at the Presidio export pens the day before and crossed into Mexico during the late afternoon. Total travel time was 16 hours. The horses were not given food or water during the entire transport.

Transport Company:
Moreno Cattle Company
DOT 2327265



Horse inside trailer



Livestock trucks loaded with horses waiting at checkpoint

The plant entrance was guarded, but since the investigators arrived with the trucks the security guard decided to let them enter the plant premises as well. Outside of the slaughter plant, a large holding area was visible that contained hundreds of horses. The trucks backed up to the loading ramp and the seal was checked by plant personnel. Earlier that night, the drivers had told the investigators that they are not allowed to break this seal, even if there was an emergency such as a horse going down inside the trailer.



Official checking seal



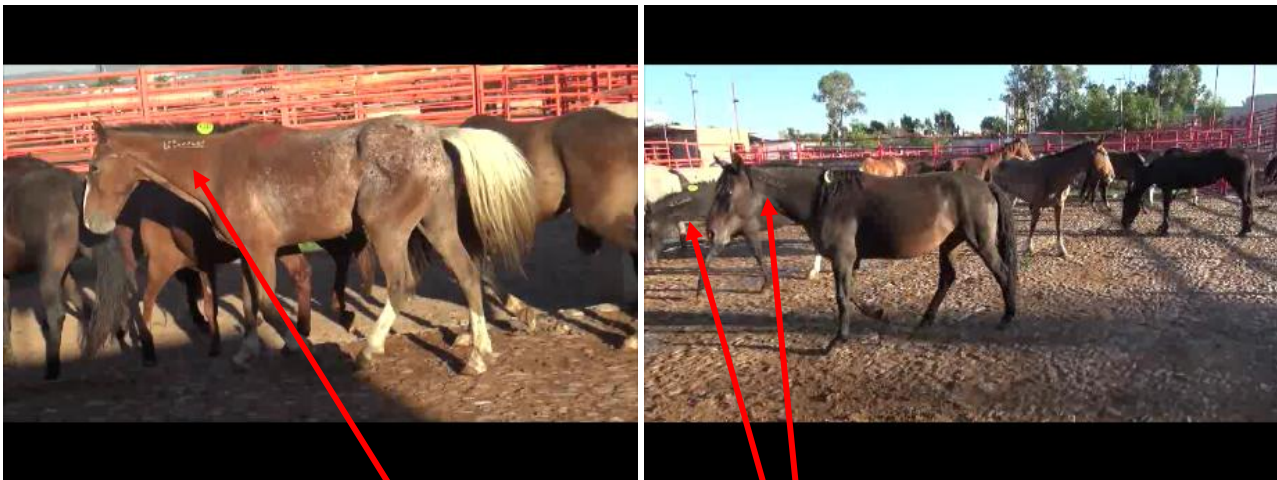
Unloading of US horses

The trucks immediately started to unload, the handling was calm and without any hitting. Several horses were observed limping when they walked down the ramp. Some of the horses were very thin. Many had snotty noses and eyes that appeared infected. Thoroughbreds were noted amongst them as well as several **horses displaying the BLM freeze brand.** The horses were put in a large pen without access to food and water.

7:45am: The trucks finished unloading



Thin horses



Horses with BLM brands

According to paperwork obtained by Animals' Angels, these horses came from **Triple Crown Ranch in Meeker, OK**. 31 horses were unloaded from the first trailer, 27 horses from the second trailer. Nothing on the owner/shipper paperwork indicates that any BLM branded horses were among the ones loaded, despite the fact the shipper is required to enter this information on the owner/shipper certificate. Additionally, the information regarding sex, breed and age of the horses in different Triple Crown Ranch shipments is identical on multiple owner/shipper certificates, **which proves that the paperwork has been falsified.**

Animals' Angels was able to identify two of the BLM branded horses found in the shipment:

Freeze brand #: 06181485 and 00832889
Signalment key #: HF1AAAHB and HM1EEEFIP

The six year old mare was prepped in Ridgecrest, CA and then shipped to Hutchinson, KS in October 2008. In August of 2009 she went to the maintenance facility at Pauls' Valley, OK and was adopted in September 2009 to someone living in Mayetta, KS. The BLM Oklahoma City Office (Pauls' Valley) issued the title to the adopter. The other horse was born in 2000, gathered at the Wyoming Stewart Creek/Chain Lakes area in March of 2002. He went to Rock Springs for preparation and was adopted on 6/15/02 by someone in Wisconsin. The identity of the other horses observed remains unknown.



BLM horse



severely emaciated horse with US slaughter tag



US horses in pen area



Investigators were informed that the horses would not be slaughtered right away, but kept in the holding area for a while. Inside the holding area many horses with green USDA slaughter tag were visible. Several were extremely emaciated.

While documenting conditions inside the holding area, investigators were approached by plant personnel and informed that they were not allowed to film any longer. The plant manager told them that the slaughter plant was run by the state and that each visitor had to fill out an official document requesting permission to enter the premises. Furthermore, he stated that the guard that granted access would be fired. Disappointed, investigators left the plant and decided to drive to the Jerez facility.

9/19/12

Location:

Carnicos de Jerez

Carretera Jerez – Sanchez Roman Km 27.5, C.P. 99380
Jerez, Zacatecas

1:30pm: Investigators arrived at the Jerez slaughter plant. Public documents indicated that the plant did receive horses from the US that day:

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Shipper/Details:

- Mc Daniels & Sons, Brookston, TX
- 30 horses (31,644lbs) - amount received: \$11,708.28
- Horses were loaded in Brookston, TX on 9/17/12 at 11:45am
- Mexican Transport Company: Transportes Chavez

Other examples of origin/shipment info for US horses arriving at this plant:

Owner/Shipper	Location:	Distance to export pen	Distance export pen to plant
Dennis Chavez	Los Lunas, NM	388 miles	579 miles
Dorian Ayache	Lebanon, TN	1268 miles	579 miles
John Sanders	Marland, OK	761 miles	579 miles
Terry Saulters	Waco, TX	528 miles	579 miles
Mitch Stanley	Hamburg, AK	724 miles	551 miles

The location has changed since Animals' Angels last visit; a solid wall has been erected around the premises, which completely blocked the view of the unloading pens and the plant. A new security gate has been built with an office next to it.

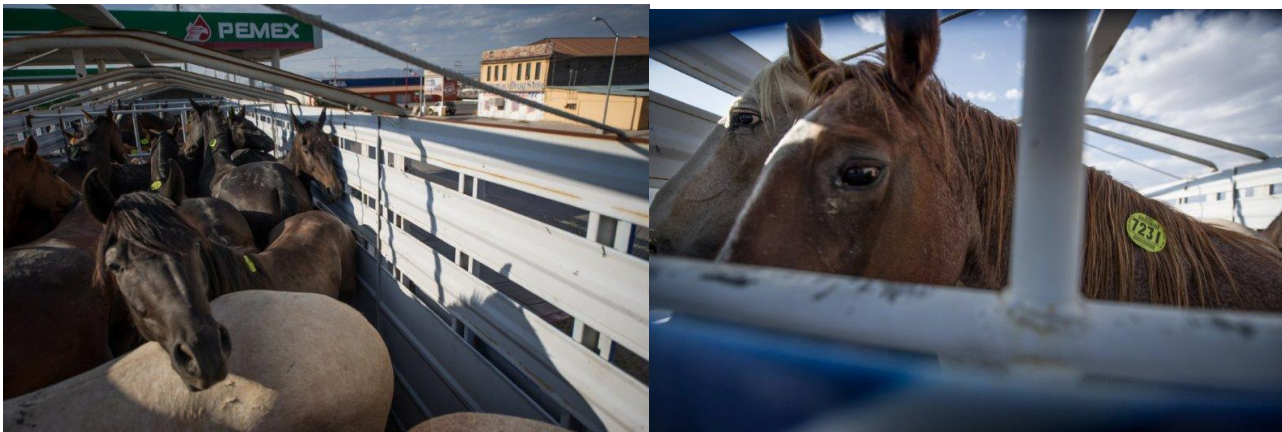


Since there was no way to obtain any documentation, investigators decided to head back towards Camargo. En route, investigators were stopped by police and military, which searched the car and harshly questioned the investigators about the purpose of their stay. They were informed that the area was not safe and that they should not be on the road after dark.

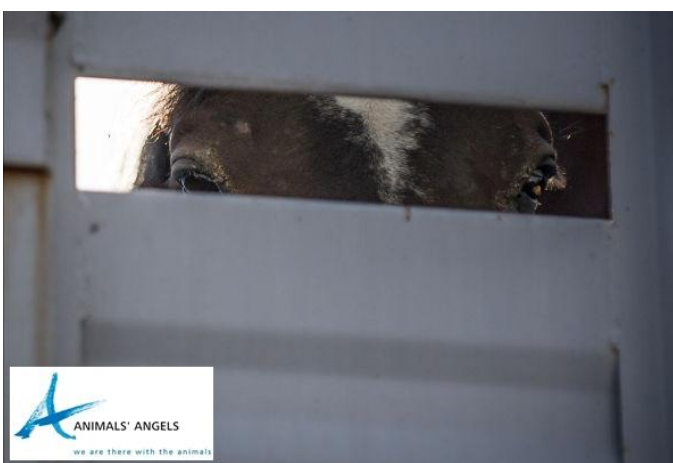
Back at the border crossing to Presidio, investigators noticed that many trucks crossing into Mexico from the US parked at a dry lot close to the border, dropped the loaded trailer and then returned to the US. Shortly thereafter, the loaded trailers were picked up by different Mexican transport trucks, a procedure that likely has to do with US DOT regulations. Presumably, the trucks that pick up the horses for the final transport to the plant do not have authorization to drive on US soil.

The first truck with horses crossed through the border at 5:00 pm. The white Freightliner (Transport Company: Autotransportes des Conchos; DOT 0556446) pulled one of the newer, open roof trailers, which offer no protection from sun or rain. Investigators documented the condition of the horses inside the sealed trailer. Two dividers were placed inside the trailer, segregating horses into three groups. The compartments were quite crowded and the horses were observed biting each other and fighting for space.

Unlike during the first trailing, the drivers were very hostile and threatened to destroy our camera equipment.



The next truck crossing through was a red Volvo pulling a Silver Star single deck trailer. (Transport Company: Moreno; DOT 2327265). Investigators documented as many horses as possible before being forced to stop filming. They then decided to head to the Camargo slaughter plant.



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10/20/12-10/26/12

Empacadora de Ganadera de Camargo

Carretera Panamericana Km 64

Colonia Agricola Industrial, C.P. 33750

Cd. Camargo, Chihuahua

The Camargo slaughter house is the newest addition to the list of EU approved plants. The facility is a mid-size building outside of town, located off highway 45 along a small, unmarked road. A large pen area, partially covered, is located at the rear end of the property.

Examples of origin/shipment info for US horses arriving at this plant:

Owner/Shipper	Location	Distance to export pen	Distance between export pen and plant
Dennis Chavez	Los Lunas, NM	388 miles	162 miles
Dominic Palandri	Florence, AZ	646 miles	162 miles
George Baker	Stroud, OK	728 miles	162 miles
Jeff Haynes	Dupont, IN	1468 miles	162 miles
John Sanders	Marland, OK	761 miles	162 miles
Joe Western	Diamond, MO	902 miles	162 miles

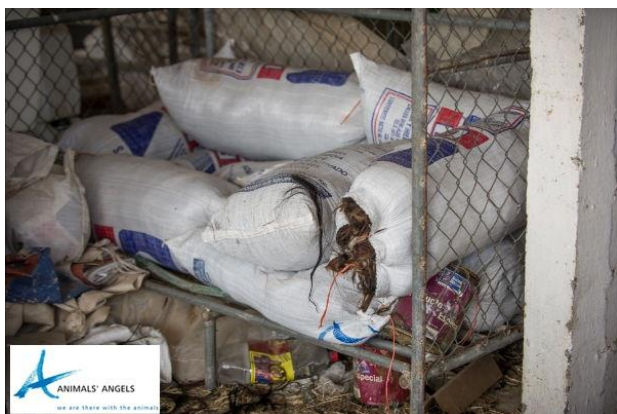
Investigators immediately noticed a death pit on one side of the property. Several horses had been dumped there and left uncovered for the vultures to eat. They were in various stages of decomposition. No bullet holes were visible. Horse parts and bones were scattered throughout the area, likely dragged away from the pit by scavengers.



A small truck loaded with carcass parts left the plant and was observed loading them into a bigger truck down the road at an empty building. After the exchange, both trucks returned to the plant. It is unclear why they did not load on the slaughter plant premises.



Investigators were able to access the holding area of the plant. On one side, a large amount of horse tails and horse hair was placed on wooden planks for drying. Some of the hair had USDA slaughter tags still attached. The dried horse hair was packaged into feed sacks, which were stacked up along a wall.



The holding area is quite substantial with numerous pens and concrete feed troughs along its side. Not all of the pens provide shelter from the desert sun. Several horses inside the holding pens were very thin. Investigators observed the horses being fed hay one time during their observation, however, the feed troughs were often documented empty. Several pens did not have access to water at all times.

Many had large red, three digit numbers or letters painted on them. Lots of USDA slaughter tags were visible. In one of the pens, investigators found a downer horse. He did not move even when it was approached by the investigators, his mouth was open and only shallow breathing was visible. Investigators did not see any plant workers check on the horse.



Thin horses with large numbers/letters



Horse being down inside the pen area



Thin horses in pens with no shelter and empty feed troughs

Later, investigators filmed a group of US horses who were moved from the pens to the plant to be slaughtered. Workers moved them with the help of plastic sticks with multiple, split ends. The overall handling was calm with the exception of one worker who was seen impatiently whipping horses in one of the pens. All pens close to the plant have slippery, concrete flooring with no bedding and several horses were observed sliding and falling down with full force.



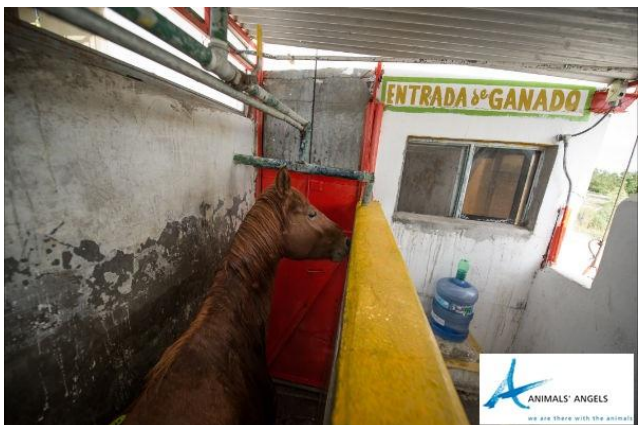
Once the horses had left the pen area, they were lined up in front of the plant entrance. They were moved through a tight chute with concrete walls. The paperwork was checked again.



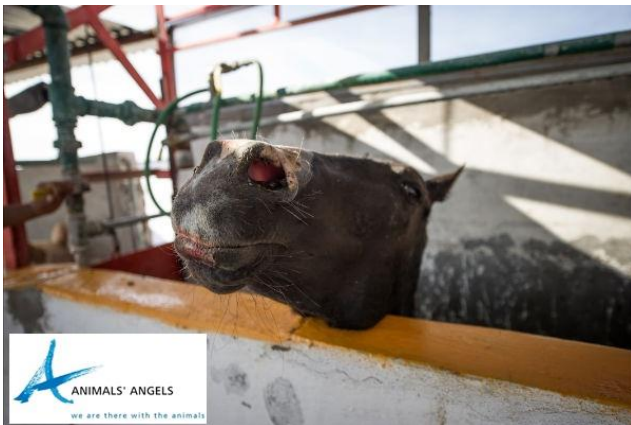
Horse in chute leading to plant entrance



Last paperwork check



While being in there, the horses had to pass through a shower that rinsed them off before they entered the plant. Several of the horses were terrified.

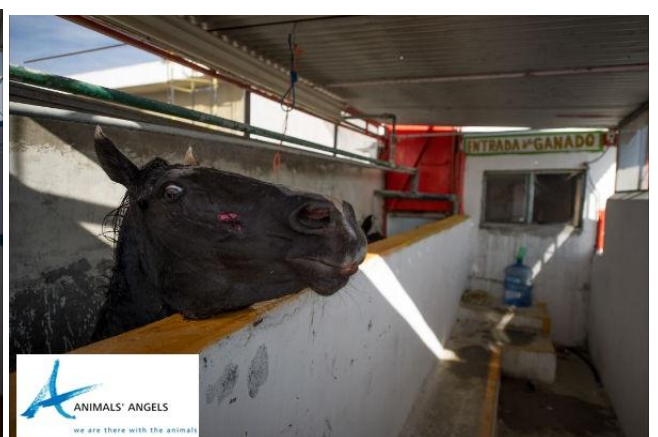
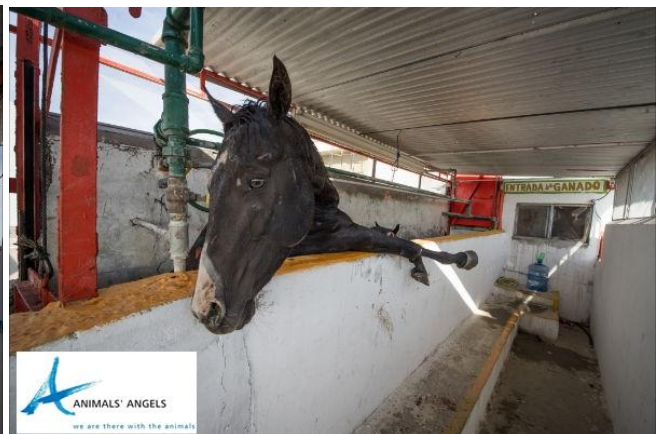
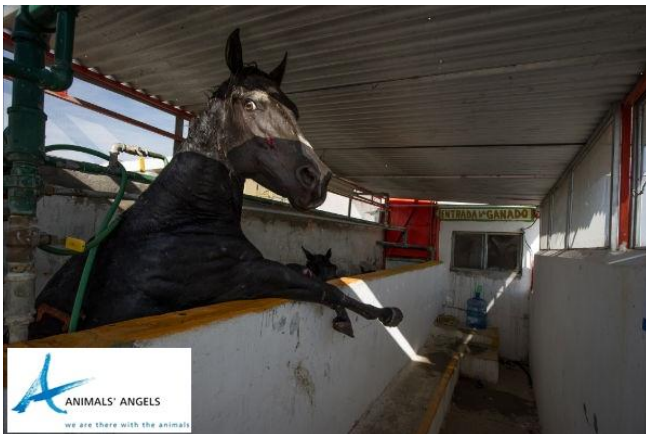


Terrified horse



Shower area

One stunning black horse with a white blaze panicked and tried to jump the concrete wall. Workers hit him and forced him to back down, but he injured himself in the process and obtained a bleeding injury on his face.



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Investigators asked if they would be allowed to witness the slaughter of these horses, but they were denied access. However, investigators were able to acquire documentation of the slaughter at a later time.

Video footage obtained of the slaughter of two US horses inside the Camargo plant confirms that horses are stunned with a captive bolt prior to slaughter. In both cases, the captive bolt was placed directly on the horse's forehead when fired.

Both horses immediately collapsed and did not attempt to rise again. After the horse was stunned, the bottom part of the front of the kill box opened and a worker attached a metal chain to the hind leg of the horse. The horse was lifted up and a female worker drew blood. Afterwards, the horse was cut open and bled out.



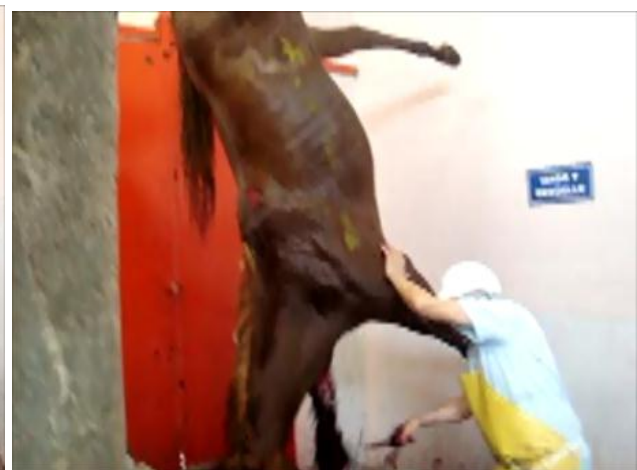
Horse being stunned with captive bolt



Worker attaching chain to hind leg



Worker drawing blood



Worker bleeding horse

Once that was finished, the horse was moved down the line for further processing. A small “laboratory” was visible.



Conclusions:

The investigation revealed several areas of concern. Council Directive 2002/99/EC states that third countries importing meat into the European Union have to comply with Community Legislation.

Specifically, animal welfare requirements at slaughter must be met in accordance with Council Directive 93/119/EC:

Article 3:

- *Animals shall be spared any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering during movement, lairaging, restraint, stunning, slaughter or killing.*

⇒ Observations at the Camargo plant show that horses slip and fell during movement to the plant due to slippery surfaces. Additionally, one horse panicked after being showered and tried to escape over the concrete

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wall of the chute obtaining a bleeding face injury. A non-ambulatory horse was observed which did not receive immediate attention.

ANNEX A: REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MOVEMENT AND LAIRAGING OF ANIMALS IN SLAUGHTERHOUSES

- 9. *Animals which are not taken directly upon arrival to the place of slaughter must have **drinking water available to them** from appropriate facilities at all times. Animals which have not been slaughtered within 12 hours of their arrival must be fed, and must subsequently be given moderate amounts of food at appropriate intervals.*

⇒ Observations at the Camargo plant as well as the Aguacalientes plant show that horses did not have access to water at all times.

Other concerns:

⇒ Many horses from the United States arrived in extremely emaciated condition. Since all horses are checked by Mexican veterinarians prior to import, their condition, shipper and arrival time should be documented. This documentation should be shared with US authorities for enforcement of local animal cruelty laws.

⇒ Horses are transported to the plant in open roof trailers which offer no protection from the desert sun.

⇒ Evidence obtained by Animals' Angels shows that the paperwork used to identify the horses in the individual shipment is falsified and not reliable. Without proper identification of each horse it can't be determined where the horse came from and what kind of drugs it has been given.