



# BRIEFING: Horse Slaughter in the UK – an Animal Aid Investigation

## CAMPAIGN AIM

TO INTRODUCE NATIONAL LIMITS ON HORSE BREEDING TO  
PREVENT SURPLUS, UNWANTED HORSES BEING SLAUGHTERED

Animal Aid first uncovered the killing of horses in a UK slaughterhouse in 2006. In 2019, we undertook a follow-up investigation into horse slaughter at one of the few slaughterhouses in the UK that is licensed to kill horses: F Drury and Sons in Somerset. Horse slaughter is legal in the UK, and we do not allege that workers at F Drury and Sons were breaking animal welfare laws.

We filmed 267 horses and ponies being killed over five days between October 2019 and February 2020. Horses of differing breeds and types and of various ages were presented for slaughter, including professional sport horses, and others from specific breed societies and managed feral herds. Researchers from BBC Panorama were able to identify, in our footage, some horses from the racing industry - including those who had earned substantial sums of money for their owners through racing, as well as others who had ended up at slaughter because of their perceived lack of ability.

Animal Aid has campaigned against the use of horses by the racing industry since 2000. Far from being 'treated like kings', our research demonstrates that - largely due to an absence of regulation - race horses are speculatively bred in their thousands, risk being injured or killed while racing, and may be disposed of when they stop being useful.

It is important to note that the British and Irish racing industries are inextricably linked and reliant upon each other in terms of the breeding, free-movement and racing of horses. It stands, therefore, that the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) and the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) must take equal responsibility for providing for race horses once they are considered to be no longer of use.

### **Welfare issues surrounding the transportation of horses**

The regulations concerning horse transportation are

complex but it appears that some horses who arrive at Drury's slaughterhouse have endured long journeys from Ireland. Thoroughbreds, especially, are highly strung and prone to anxiety, so long journeys can only add to their stress. Horses were kept at the slaughterer's own farm on some occasions before being delivered for slaughter. Our undercover footage at the farm's lairage showed that it did not appear to have been 'mucked out' for some time.

### **Breeding and lack of regulation in the racing industry**

In recent decades the number of Thoroughbreds born into the British and Irish racing industries each year has been relatively consistent. Ireland supplies, through export, about half of all horses who race in Great Britain. Around 14,000 foals are 'produced' annually by the two nations combined. There is no regulation on breeding numbers. This is a major welfare problem as supply is greater than demand.

### **Reasons why horses leave racing and provision for horses after racing**

The majority of race horses will not gain enough prize-money (if any) to cover the costs of their training and racing - and therefore will have very short careers. Horses usually start racing early in their lives, but this can end abruptly after just a few races, whilst others who enter training are quickly dismissed as failures before ever putting a hoof on a racecourse. The racing industry claims that its own officially funded organisation, Retraining of Racehorses (RoR), has around 8,000 members. This is a small number when compared to the number of horses leaving racing each year. The breeding industry also generates more 'surplus' horses. Current RoR policy focuses on financing competitions for ex-racehorses,



whilst former associates of RoR (and horse sanctuaries which are desperate for funds) are overburdened with racing industry cast-offs for whom they try to offer a lifeline and a future.

### Number of horses slaughtered

In 2019, 2,165 solipeds\* were killed in licensed slaughterhouses in England. Of that number, **347 horses were registered with Weatherbys Passports**<sup>1</sup> (NB Weatherbys is the passport issuing agency for the racing industry).

There are four abattoirs that kill horses in the UK, all of them in England, and two in Ireland. It is unknown how many horses – whether from racing or not – are killed by knackermen (mobile slaughterers who kill animals on farms, etc, rather than the animal coming to them).

### Post slaughter

Our research indicates that horse meat fit for human consumption, from F Drury & Sons, is sold abroad. Meat deemed unfit for human consumption was either given to a zoo or to a hunt or simply thrown away.

### Aims and Objectives

#### Regulation

- The absence of Government intervention in horse welfare is reflected in the current equine crisis. Overbreeding is a major cause of the problem. The government needs to impose a limit on stallion covering numbers (matings) to reduce the number of foals born annually, ensuring responsibility for the lifetime care of equines and needs to promote best practice standards amongst those who breed horses. Clear, timetabled targets will ensure that the number of horses being bred falls to a level where all horses can be looked after once they cease to ‘be of use.’
- Government regulation must address the racing and sport horse industries and specific breed societies and focus on inexperienced individuals lacking horse management resources.

- The Government should impose a levy on all those who breed, use and sell horses, which would help to discourage over-breeding, and ensure better provision for horses throughout their lives.

#### Full transparency

- The situation regarding horse slaughter continues, largely due to a lack of transparency. This must be remedied by all passport issuing agencies being required to provide full data to the government, relating to the births, sales, careers, movements and deaths of all horses born in Britain and Ireland. The government should publish annual statistics on the number of horses who are born, sold and killed.

#### Full accountability

- Breeders and owners, as well as the huge commercial bookmakers and bloodstock operations, must be compelled to financially provide for the horses they have used. A tax on breeders, owners, trainers and bloodstock companies would raise the necessary funds to care for horses, and ensure that they are not slaughtered.
- The racing regulators of Britain and Ireland must impose on bloodstock auctions and other horse sales a minimum bid of £400 for all Thoroughbred horses being sold.

### Conclusion

Whilst it is perfectly legal to slaughter horses for their meat, Animal Aid believes that this issue is a matter of public interest. Animal Aid is a vegan campaigning organisation, and one of our core beliefs is that no animal should face slaughter. The situation regarding horse slaughter can be addressed and remedied by government intervention. See [www.animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter](http://www.animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter) for more information.

\*soliped “A mammal having a single hoof on each foot”

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ifhaonline.org/default.asp?section=Resources&area=4&FF=13&CK=E&YR=2018&key=20> and <https://www.ifhaonline.org/default.asp?section=Resources&area=4&FF=13&CK=E&YR=2018&key=14>

For more information, visit [www.animalaid.org.uk](http://www.animalaid.org.uk)

