

Gallatin Processor Proposes Horse Slaughterhouse

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Ranchers in northwest Missouri are used to taking cattle to slaughter. However, a new livestock might soon be on its way to market.



Just outside Gallatin is Rains Meats. The plant had been a cattle and hog processor since 1989 before closing down last year. Co-owner David Rains says going into the horse business is a way to get the plant operational again. He says it's also a way to take care of a horse overpopulation problem. Right now, 170,000 horses per year are shipped to Mexico for slaughter.

"It's a business opportunity for us that's a little bit unique," said David Rains. Plus it's going to serve the purpose of eliminating the major problem of all the unwanted horses in the country. Horses dying a slow, cruel death of starvation and old age. They would be better off being euthanized basically."

The U.S.D.A. has approved a horse slaughterhouse in New Mexico. They are reviewing requests for five more facilities, including Rains' plant in Gallatin. A decision is expected in the next few weeks.

Meat from the plant would be sold overseas, where there is not as much of a stigma to eating horse meat.

The Humane Society of the United States has spoken out against the plants and are trying to get a federal injunction to stop horse slaughterhouses from opening.

"There's a lot of people that are well meaning and have a lot of concern over it, but they really don't understand the big picture," Rains said. "The potential pain and anxiety that these horses are going through with a slow starvation." We need to get this deal going. Every horse we take off the farm that doesn't starve to death, even if they [cut our funding], is one the coyotes aren't killing."

Horse slaughterhouses last operated in the U.S. in 2007 before Congress banned the practice by eliminating funding for plant inspections.

Federal lawmakers restored those cuts in 2011, but the U.S.D.A. has been slow in granting permits.

At the same time, there is now a Senate bill pending that would ban horse slaughterhouses.