

# **Congress Cuts Horse Slaughter Funding**

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Congress' latest budget bill tries to block the resumption of horse slaughter in the U.S. by cutting funding for inspections of the process.

The prohibition on spending by the Department of Agriculture is included in the \$1.1 trillion budget bill that Congress sent to President Obama on Thursday.

Animal protection groups applauded the vote.

"Americans care for horses, we ride horses, and we even put them to work. But we don't eat horses in the United States. And we shouldn't be gathering them up and slaughtering them for people to eat in far-off places," said Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States, one of a number of groups involved in litigation that has blocked proposed horse slaughterhouses from opening in New Mexico, Missouri and Iowa.

The last domestic horse slaughterhouses closed in 2007, a year after Congress first cut funding for the inspections in an attempt to shutter the industry.

Funding was restored in 2011, and Valley Meat Co. in Roswell, N.M., has been fighting since to convert its small cattle operation to horse slaughter. Last year, Valley and plants in Iowa and Missouri received federal permits to open, but the efforts have been blocked by a series of court orders.

Valley's efforts ignited an emotional, national debate over whether horses are companion animals or livestock, and sparked divisions between rescue groups, Indian tribes and politicians over the most humane way to deal with neglected and abandoned horses.

Proponents argue it is better to slaughter unwanted horses domestically than have them shipped thousands of miles to Canada or less humane facilities in Mexico.

"The message from Capitol Hill is loud and clear on this issue: Our horses deserve better, and this abhorrent industry will not be tolerated," said Nancy Perry, senior vice president of ASPCA Government Relations.

Despite the growing government action to keep horse slaughter from resuming, an attorney for Valley and Rains Natural Meats of Gallatin, Mo., said Thursday his group will continue to fight to produce horse meat.

Blair Dunn said the companies would be looking at filing a claim that the funding ban violates provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

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