

# Judge to Rule Whether Horse Slaughter Plant Can Open

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A judge in Santa Fe is expected to decide Monday whether a Roswell company can start slaughtering horses.

State District Judge Matthew Wilson is hearing a request from Attorney General Gary King to issue a preliminary injunction against Valley Meat Co.

King has filed suit against the company, alleging its operations would violate state environmental and food safety laws.

The plant was blocked from opening last year after animal protection groups filed a federal lawsuit against the Department of Agriculture for issuing permits to Valley and two other companies that would become the first domestic plants to slaughter horses in seven years. A federal judge in Albuquerque threw out that lawsuit. And after a federal appeals court declined to keep the plants shuttered, King filed the state suit.

King argues horses are given drugs not approved for animals that are to be slaughtered for human consumption.

Valley's attorney, Blair Dunn, says because the meat would be shipped overseas, the state lacks jurisdiction.

Dunn has accused King of conspiring with animal protection groups to block a lawful business with a frivolous lawsuit to further his gubernatorial bid.

Valley Meat and companies in Missouri and Iowa last year won federal permits to become the first horse slaughterhouses to operate since Congress effectively banned the practice by cutting funding for inspections at plants in 2006. The last of the domestic plants closed in 2007. Congress reinstated the funding in 2011.

Valley Meat owner Rick De Los Santos has led the effort to force the Department of Agriculture to permit the horse slaughter plants, sparking an emotional, national debate on whether horses are livestock or companion animals.

Animal protection groups argue the practice is barbaric.

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.

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