

Review of Natural Valley Farms horse slaughter footage

by

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About the reviewer:

Dr. Nicholas Dodman is a Professor in the Department of Clinical Sciences at Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. He is one of the world's most noted and celebrated veterinary behaviourists. His veterinary training in Scotland also included training in slaughterhouse practices and meat inspection. He worked for twenty years as an equine anesthesiologist during which time he became acutely aware of the signs of returning consciousness in horses. Additionally, Dr. Dodman is a Pet Expert for Parade and writes a monthly "Expert Advice" column for Martha Stewart's Body & Soul magazine.

Review:

I had an opportunity to review hidden camera video footage of horses being slaughtered at Natural Valley Farms located in Neudorf, Saskatchewan. I found the process extremely concerning. In particular, the practices were inappropriate, inhumane and unsupervised.

The key problem areas can be divided into four categories:

1. Health condition of the horses
2. Improper design of the slaughterhouse and kill box
3. Worker attitudes and hostile environment
4. The horse as a flight species

Health Condition of the Horses:

Horses that should not have been transported or sent to slaughter were present at the plant. Horses with medical conditions should not be shipped for slaughter. Some of these horses would not have passed meat inspection.

Improper Design of the Slaughterhouse and Kill Box:

The floor of the kill box was slippery, so that when the terrified horses tried to run or jump their way out of the box they often slipped and fell on the bloody metal floor, or their feet would spin around as if they were running on an ice rink. The fact that metal shoes had been left on the majority of the horses made this fear-inducing problem worse.

The sides of the kill box were not high enough to prevent the horse within it from seeing the disturbing sight of the other horses being hung, stuck and butchered.

The kill box was too wide and too long. Designed for cattle, it is completely inappropriate for horses. The length of the kill box allowed horses to back away from the stunner's access site.

Disturbingly, the foot cutter (amputation device) is next in line after the horses' throats are punctured (one side only). It is highly likely that some of the horses have their feet cut off while still partly conscious.

Worker Attitudes and Hostile Environment:

Horses driven into the kill box were, for the most part, terrified. I believe this was because of the way they were being handled (horses are accustomed to being led, not driven); the use of prod sticks; the cacophonous clamor of the plant (clanging, compressed air sounds, yelling by the workers); the poor attitude of the stunner(s); and the general frightening environment created.

The captive bolt operator(s) and suspenders were impatient and cruel to the horses – hitting them repeatedly with their prods (often when it was of no use), kicking one horse in the face whose head had become lodged in the cattle head stanchion, cursing at them and with an overall attitude lacking empathy or professionalism.

The Horse as a Flight Species:

Because of the unsuitability of the slaughter setup, the captive bolt operator is often trying to hit a moving target, and in some cases is unable to locate the kill spot on the horses' foreheads because the horse had turned around, slumped down, or moved backward in the kill box. When the stunner is trying to hit a brain the size of an orange in a skull the size of a suitcase any movement is likely to lead to incomplete stunning. I observed several horses being improperly "stunned". Mouthing, tonguing, full head movements and paddling of the feet were not uncommonly seen as horses were dragged

away to be hung and bled out. Some of these horses were likely still conscious as they were being bled and sent through the butchering line.

Recommendation:

It is my recommendation that Natural Valley Farms be closed immediately and that all slaughter of equines in Canada be terminated as this footage shows clearly that horses cannot be slaughtered through a large-scale assembly line without being subjected to a very high and unacceptable risk of prolonged suffering.