

Work document excluded Horses for the foodchain (Belgium only)

The horse meat market is a viable market in the EU and currently the demand is not being fully satisfied by domestic production.

We have a situation in the EU where due to inappropriate documentation many horses fit for human consumption are currently being excluded from the food chain. We suggest that a very large proportion of these animals pose no risk to public health and are far safer than imports and we advocate a change in the current regulatory arrangements to enable these animals to be processed safely.

We acknowledge that the protection of both consumer health and consumer confidence is paramount and consider that working with the Ministries of Agriculture and the Food Safety Authorities in Belgium, other member states and EFSA, and arrangement can be devised that will protect public and prevent the needless waste of good protein and horse welfare.

FIGURES FOR BELGIUM

Official registered Horses in BEL (source BCP 09/04/2013)	238,922 Horses
Excluded for slaughter	41.9% (>100,000 Horses)

REASON FOR EXCLUSION

Old Horses that were NOT registered before 31/12/2009
Animals not registered as a foal
Choice by owner
Medical Treatment

All horses must have a chip according to EU law, EU93/625/EG

CONSEQUENCES

ECONOMICAL

>100,000 excluded Horses

This could **generate a commercial business of 60 million €**

200kg meat per animal at average price of €3 per kg

It is morally wrong to disregard a good source of protein with people in the world starving. Some practical measures could be put in place to ensure that this meat poses no risk to human health.

A blanket exclusion is not a substitute for a more creative solution.

>100,000 excluded Horses

JUST FEEDING AND BASIC maintenance costs 145 million €

This is a recurring annual cost, additional costs of veterinary and farrier attention has not being considered.

Creation of Jobs

Trading in live horses, slaughter house, further processing of horse meat, wholesalers and distributors.

ANIMAL WELFARE

At present lame or injured animals, older animals and poor performers with no purposes have no economic value and the consequences are that we are sitting on a welfare timebomb.

In the current economic climate many of these horses are likely to be neglected. To prevent a welfare crisis a disposal scheme of some type will have to be devised, however, for the subset of these animals that are fit for human consumption, enabling them enter the food chain should be considered as a viable option.

RESPONSIBLY USING PROTEIN

We are living in a world where demand for protein is growing daily in both the emerging economies and some of the poorer Third World countries.

The FAO has published a document on “edible insects” in an effort to identify additional sources of protein. It is not logical to be seeking new source when excluding **a perfectly good one**.

We have the capability within the EU with the European Food Safety Authority and the National Food Safety Agencies to develop a regimen for ensuring safe horse meat is allowed into the food chain and consumer health is adequately protected.

A blanket exclusion of all horses without the correct documentation is currently excluding horses that pose no risk to public health and is wasteful.

ENVIRONMENT

Burning excluded Horses – **POLLUTION**

Horses buried in landfill sites.

If the safe subset of currently excluded horses were permitted to enter the food chain, the by products could be recycled and contribute to the following industries:

1. Food
2. Pharma
3. Pet Food
4. Leather
5. Energy (Fat & Bones)

CONCLUSION

If this situation continues as it is today the problem of unwanted horses will grow and the authorities will be faced with the costs of dealing with the resulting welfare problem which already exists and is growing fast.

The equine meat processing sector offers a sensible alternative and argues that it is not impossible for the food safety regulators to come up with reasonable safeguards to prevent the exclusion of safe meat from the human food chain.

We create, we do not waste.

The situation in Belgium is urgent. In several other member states similar problems exist so a pan EU solution is required and Belgium could be used as a pilot.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

A horse that is excluded (loss of passport, too late registered in database, exclusion by error) can go back into the food chain circuit when the following points are met:

A new identify document –“duplicate – transit” passport is issued.

The horse must have the new passport for 6 months before it could be presented for slaughter.

We assume that after 6 months with a clear medication history there would be no residues of all previously given medication in the animal.

Assuming this, this would mean that a Horse can be eligible for slaughter.

For additional reassurance a subset of the horse could be screened for phenylbutazone, or other medications, to provide reassurance that the system was working.

Still there are some requirements that must be met:

Movement documentation must be provided to ensure full traceability of the animal during the 6 month interval prior to slaughter.

The official Veterinary Authorities **MUST KNOW AT ALL TIMES** where the animal stands. All of the Horses **MUST BE COMMUNICATED** to the Vet Authority.

The Vet Authority can at **ALL TIMES** take a blood or urine sample during this 6 month quarantine period to monitor for medications.

If there is medical treatment during these 6 months it must be stated clearly in the transit passport. This information will be the responsibility of the practising vet.

It is logical that depending on the medication the Horse gets, that the 6 month period might be extended by some time to ensure all withdrawal times are met.

The horse may not receive during the 6 month period any medication prohibited in animals destined for the food chain.

CONCLUSION

If we succeed in this, Horse neglect will be far less likely.

Senseless destruction of nutritious products (protein and fats) and also by products (Pharma, Leather etc.) will cease.

Surveillance using blood and urine will be affordable since the economic value of the horse will have returned, if the prospect of entering the food chain exists.

This working document and proposed resolution is the result of collaboration and meetings between people that are involved daily in the horse business and are fully aware of the problem.

The people in the front line are frustrated since they see the real problem and they know that there is a more simple solution at hand.

Breeding superior performing horses whether for leisure, competitive sport or racing requires the selection of animals of high genetic merit and high athletic ability or good temperaments. However the opposite side to selecting the best is that the worst have to be culled. These, with injured and old animals, present a valuable source of protein for which there is a market demand.

The protection of the consumers' health must be paramount and also consumer confidence and working with the regulatory authorities we feel this can be achieved.