

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

For years, society has struggled to deal with an overabundance of unwanted dogs and cats. Today, because of reckless federal legislation fueled by naïve and well funded extremists, we are facing a similar predicament with marginal horses and horses eat more than dogs or cats.

Each year, roughly 100,000 U.S. horses require disposal due to frailty, old age or the inability of owners to afford proper care and upkeep. Statistics show that 138,000 unwanted horses were harvested in 2006, providing an export market of approximately \$26 million. Most horses were slain in U.S. plants under USDA supervision where the most rapid, painless and humane methods of euthanasia were used. Canada processed about 18% of the unwanted US horses, with the balance going to Mexico.

In 2007, animal rights groups like The American Horse Defense Fund and the Humane Society of the United States were successful in closing the doors of the last U.S. horse processing plant. Using sensational and emotional appeals, skilled extremists convinced legislators to ban the harvest of all horses within our borders. The consequential lack of alternatives to humane processing is resulting in abandonment and neglect of horses all across the country. As is often the case, forced changes from poorly framed legislation is proving to cause unintended problems and unnecessary suffering.

Managers of auction yards are now locking gates to their facilities to prevent the dumping of unwanted horses. Auctioneers often cannot even get a single bid when horses are run through the ring. Devin Mullet, owner of Kalona Sales Barn in Iowa, said: "This is the first time in my life I've seen livestock that has no value." Land owners are finding abandoned horses in their fields or emancipated on county roads. Brand inspectors, with responsibility to confine and indentify loose and deserted animals, are finding that many horses cannot be identified and their owners cannot be found. Now what do we do with them? They have to be fed, but they have no value. And who will pay for the feed and where do we house them? Rescue facilities are full and their budgets are spent. Groups who supported the ban have in reality created a situation where horses are more likely to be neglected due to limited alternatives.

It is fair to ask why groups and individuals that support the ban on horse processing have not stepped forward with funding, feed and facilities to care for unwanted horses. A representative of the Humane Society of the United States retorted that it is not their responsibility to solve every horse issue. Should the Federal government provide funding to care for marginal horses that cannot be harvested? Slaughter facilities were closed because of Federal legislation, and furthermore millions have already been spent on the Adopt A Wild Horse program. I, for one, think we should expunge the legislation and return to proven methods that have worked well for many years.

Some horses have been shipped across the border and processed in Canada or Mexico, though transportation costs have been prohibitive. Now, The Horse Slaughter Prevention bill is being considered by Congress with similar legislation being discussed

by the Parliament of Canada. The intent is to prevent the export of horses for slaughter, though there is a significant market for equine meat in Europe. Opponents of regulated domestic horse harvest contend that old horses should be "sent to pasture" to live out their remaining years in peace. The concept may be good, but reality is much different. Now, horses have no salvage value. Only substantial disposal costs at the end of the trail.

I wrote a column a few weeks ago referring to the growing cultural confusion the public is having regarding the role and function of animals in our society. Even the Utah State Legislature is spending an inordinate amount of time on this topic. Some people consider animals to be companions, others see them as competitors, and some see them as a food source, while others see them as equals with humans. People who have absolutely no experience caring for animals are telling seasoned agricultural producers and processors how best to manage their businesses. Unfortunately, we see no apparent end to this myopic silliness and all segments of animal agriculture are at risk.

One may ask, what are the motives of the animal rights organizations that push for such unreasonable regulations? Are they truly concerned for the welfare of the animals or is it an effort to impose their own opinions and their own style of living onto the rest of us? I suggest that many are naïve, well fed, busy bodies with time on their hands. Many may be well-meaning, but their lack of experience with animal husbandry makes their edicts unreasonable and certainly counterproductive.