



# **The Horse Slaughter Industry in Argentina 2015 Follow Up Investigation**

**Investigation carried out in conjunction with Tierschutzbund  
Zuerich/Animal Welfare Foundation**

## **Introduction:**

There are approx. two million horses in Argentina. In 2011, 130,000 horses were slaughtered, exclusively for export. Argentinean law states that it is forbidden to sell horsemeat for human consumption in Argentina. In 2014, 5,537 tons of horsemeat were exported to the EU - 724 tons to the Netherlands, 696 tons to France, 2,657 tons to Belgium and 1,461 tons to Italy<sup>1</sup>. In Switzerland, horsemeat imports from Argentina have decreased from 532 tons in 2011 to 165 tons in 2014<sup>2</sup>, probably due to the repeated news coverage about the cruelty involved and the slaughter of stolen horses.

There are currently four EU approved horse slaughter plants in Argentina. However, the horses are not commercially raised for meat production, the horses slaughtered are former sport, working and riding horses. Officially, they are "descarte de otras actividades" ("disposal from other activities"), which includes sick, injured and old animals. Argentina does not have a microchip system in place and horse theft is a major problem. In February 2013, a considerable number of stolen horses were recovered by their owners from the Lamar slaughterhouse, and this was not just an isolated incident. There have been many similar reports in Argentinean media about stolen horses being sent to slaughter.

Slaughter horses in Argentina are treated humanely, neither during transport nor at the slaughter plant. Multiple investigations in the past five years have documented horrific abuse and extremely long transport routes without any water, feed or rest. At collecting station, horses were beaten with sticks and bitten by dogs. Injured and sick horses did not receive any veterinary care. Inside the open-roof trailer, the horses were exposed to the blazing sun and pouring rain. In February, August and September 2013, numerous violations against applicable EU welfare requirements were documented at the Lamar slaughter plant (slippery floors, no shelter in outdoor pens, no euthanasia of suffering

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat (EU Trade Since 1988 by HS2, 4, 6 and CN8)

<sup>2</sup> Source: Eidgenössische Zollverwaltung EZV

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## **INVESTIGATIONS & ADVOCACY**



horses, violent handling, use of electric prods, inaccurate stunning). Severely injured, dying and dead horses were found in the holding pens. After these findings were released in Europe in March of 2014, the Dutch supermarket chain Jumbo carried out their own audit in Argentina. They found the conditions at Lamar to be unacceptable and immediately stopped all imports. Swiss supermarkets also stopped selling horsemeat from Argentina. In April of 2014, the inspection company SGS withdrew Lamar's animal welfare certification. However, as of today, Lamar is still on the list of EU approved plants.

The Argentinean laws dealing with the transport of farm animals do not offer them much protection<sup>3</sup>. Horses can legally be transported for 36 hours without access to food or water. In 2014, Argentina adopted a regulation for the protection of animals at slaughter<sup>4</sup>; however, these requirements are far below EU standards.

In addition to serious animal welfare concerns, there is also a high risk of drug residues in horsemeat from Argentina. There is no system of traceability; the last owner of the horse simply has to sign an affidavit regarding any veterinary treatments during the last 6 months. Phenylbutazone and other drugs can be bought without prescription. Furthermore, many of the stolen horses that are sold for slaughter are sport or pleasure horses that were never intended for human consumption. It is therefore very likely they were treated with substances that are not permitted for slaughter horses.

## **Investigation:**

### **Slaughterhouse Lamar**

#### **Address:**

Frigorífico Lamar  
Ruta 5 km 93  
Mercedes  
Provincia de Buenos Aires

**EU approval number: 1451**

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<sup>3</sup> Resolución 97/1999, <http://www.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/55000-59999/55716/norma.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Resolución N° 46/2014, <http://infoleg.mecon.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/225000-229999/226148/norma.htm>



## Observations:

1:00pm: A transporter loaded with horses was parked in front of the entrance gate and shortly afterwards entered the plant. The truck belongs to the company “Transporte Don Isaac” and is a **typical Argentinean livestock transporter that has no roof and offers no protection from the elements**. The transport consisted of a truck & trailer and was pulling another trailer. The trailer had two compartments and the horses were transported in three groups.



*Horses arriving at Lamar*

After entering the plant, the truck was unloaded within 20 minutes. The person who unloaded the horses climbed up to the open roof of the trailer and walked on the metal bars above the horses’ heads, which made them very nervous. He used a long stick to make the horses walk off the trailer and was **repeatedly hitting the horses’ heads**. The vehicle has four trap-doors, which **are way too low for horses**, since Argentinean livestock trucks are designed for cattle. **Several horses were hitting their heads hard against the trap-doors and were at risk of obtaining head injuries**.

In 2013, many horses with horrible head injuries were found in the holding pens of Lamar, which probably had occurred during transport (see investigative report of September 2013).

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*Unloading of horses at Lamar*



*Worker hitting horse on the head*



*Horse hitting the head against low trap-door*

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Another worker moved the horses to the pen area, using a stick with a yellow flag. A grey horse was observed slipping in the alley. Another horse was **severely limping and had difficulty keeping pace** with the others. The horses were put into a **small, overcrowded holding pen**. Several horses were thin, with their ribs and hip bones clearly visible.

All the horses wore ear tags, as required by Argentinean law. However, the ear tags are put in at the slaughter horse collecting station, shortly before being loaded for slaughter, which does not guarantee satisfactory traceability.



*Emaciated Horse*

At 5:10pm, another transporter arrived at the plant. The truck belonged to the company “Transporte El Turquito” from Entre Rios. The horses were put into a small pen next to the other group of horses that arrived earlier.



*Overcrowded holding pens at Lamar*

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The horses from these two transports were the only ones present at the plant; the **large pastures behind the pen area appeared overgrown and unused.**

3:00am:

Additional horses had been delivered to the plant and had been put into pens adjacent to the main building. The pens appeared to be overcrowded. Animals easily **develop aggressive behaviour in crowded conditions and investigators noted** a black horse that **repeatedly was biting the surrounding horses.**



*Horse biting the others*

### **Slaughter Plant Entre Rios**

#### **Address:**

Frigorífico Equino Entre Rios S.A.  
Calle Pública S/n  
Gualeduay  
Provincia de Entre Rios

**EU approval number:** 1400

**Owner:** Javier Veronesi

#### **Observations:**

9:35am: There was no activity at the plant and a worker was hosing down the empty pen area. At the back of the plant, there were approx. 20 - 30 horses in a paddock.



*Slaughter plant "Frigorifico Equino Entre Rios S.A."*

The area had **no shelter** and **no food** was visible. Many horses were thin and their ribs **very clearly visible**. A thin horse was lying down and not moving.



*Horses in paddock without shelter*



*Thin horses and horse lying down*

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Outside the perimeter fence, **investigators noticed a pile of horse carcasses. Numerous dead horses had been dumped there and left uncovered.** The carcasses were in various stages of decomposition. Horse parts and bones were scattered around the area, likely dragged away by scavengers. A pack of stray dogs inhabited the area, probably feeding on the rotting carcasses.



*Pile of dead horses next to Entre Rios plant*

### **Meeting with horse dealer Saravia**

Investigators met with a known slaughter horse dealer in **Joaquín Víctor González, a town located in the Province of Salta<sup>5</sup>.** He is the main “acopiador” in the area and operates two collecting stations. He explained that currently he was only shipping approx. three trucks per month to slaughter, as they had **not yet started bringing the horses down from the mountains.**

Saravia confirmed that he was shipping the horses to the **Solemar plant in Chimpay<sup>6</sup>** instead of the General Pico plant in Rio Cuarto (which would be much closer), because Solemar was paying better prices. **Chimpay is located in the Province of Rio Negro, a 1180 miles/30 hour transport from the collecting station.** He stated that a minimum of 32 horses were loaded onto the trucks and that all the trucks leaving from an “acopio” had to be approved by SENASA<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Conversation recorded

<sup>6</sup> EU approval number: 3986

<sup>7</sup> Veterinary authority (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria)

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### Slaughterhouse Entre Rios

Investigators returned to the “Frigorifico Equino Entre Rios S.A.” plant in Gualeguay. There were several groups of horses in the pen area and again conditions were very crowded and the horses were observed biting each other. A worker was moving a group of horses to the slaughter area with a stick. The **floor appeared to be extremely slippery, since at least six horses fell down** as they were rushed to the exit of the pen area.



*Crowded pen area at Entre Rios*



*Horses biting each other*

*Two horses slipping and falling*

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The pen area had a **smooth concrete floor**, which is very slippery, especially when covered with manure.



*Concrete floor in pen area*

At the back of the plant, there were approx. 60-80 horses in pens **without feed or shelter**. Several horses were observed **searching the dirt floor for something to eat**. In some pens, small amounts of straw and worn remains of a shelter were visible.



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*Broken shelter at Entre Rios*

Many of the horses had neglected hooves or were thin with their ribs showing. A chestnut horse was severely emaciated; his spinal cord and hip bones were clearly visible and protruding through the skin. A grey mare appeared pregnant. Several horses had fresh scratches and abrasions on their bodies, likely from transport in inadequate trailers.



*Potentially pregnant mare*



*Emaciated chestnut horse*

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## **Violations of EU animal welfare legislation**

### **1. Violations at the plants**

Slaughter plants in third countries exporting meat to the EU have to comply with minimum standards regarding animal welfare, as required in EU **Council Regulation No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing**<sup>8</sup>. Article 12 of Chapter II states:

#### ***Imports from third countries***

*The requirements laid down in Chapters II and III of this Regulation shall apply for the purposes of Article 12(2)(a) of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004.*

*The health certificate accompanying meat imported from third countries shall be supplemented by an attestation certifying that requirements at least equivalent to those laid down in Chapters II and III of this Regulation have been met.*

In 2013, numerous violations against applicable EU welfare requirements were documented at the Lamar slaughter plant (slippery floors, no shelter in outdoor pens, no euthanasia of suffering horses, violent handling, use of electric prods, inaccurate stunning). This year, it proved to be much more difficult to see the horses and their handling at Lamar and the investigators did not manage to document the slaughter process.

At the Entre Rios plant, non-compliance with several requirements of Chapter II and III of Council Regulation No 1099/2009 were documented:

- Chapter II, Article 3.1. Animals shall **be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering** during their killing and related operations.
  - Observations: multiple horses fell down as they were being rushed out of the pen area – high risk of injuries
- Chapter II, Article 3.2 For the purposes of paragraph 1, business operators shall, in particular, take the necessary measures to ensure that animals: (a) are provided with **physical comfort and protection**, in particular by being kept clean in adequate thermal conditions and **prevented from falling or slipping**; (b) are **protected from injury**;

<sup>8</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:303:0001:0030:EN:PDF>

- Observations: crowded conditions in pen area caused stress – horses were observed biting each other (Lamar, Entre Rios), no protection from adverse weather conditions (Entre Rios), extremely slippery concrete floor in pen area – many horses slip and fall, risking severe injuries (Entre Rios)
- Chapter II, Article 3.2 For the purposes of paragraph 1, business operators shall, in particular, take the necessary measures to ensure that animals: (d) do **not show signs of avoidable pain or fear** or exhibit abnormal behaviour;
  - Observations: a lame horse that was severely limping, an obvious sign of pain, was taken to the pen area instead of being slaughtered immediately (Lamar)
- Chapter II, Article 3.2 For the purposes of paragraph 1, business operators shall, in particular, take the necessary measures to ensure that animals: (e) do **not suffer from prolonged withdrawal of feed** or water;
  - Observations: hungry horses searching the dirt floor of the paddock for something to eat (Entre Rios)
- Annex II, Article 2.5. Floors shall be built and maintained in such a way as to **minimise the risk of animals slipping, falling** or injuring their feet.
  - Observations: extremely slippery floor in the pen area – numerous horses observed slipping and falling (Entre Rios)
- Annex II, Article 2.6. Where slaughterhouses have field lairages without natural shelter or shade, appropriate **protection from adverse weather conditions** shall be provided. In the absence of such protection, these lairages shall not be used under adverse weather conditions.
  - Observations: most paddocks had no shelter and no protection from sun and rain, some paddocks had a broken shelter and not enough weather protection (Entre Rios)



## **Part 2: Horse theft in Argentina**

### **2012 Investigation**

Several horse dealers who purchased horses for the Lamar slaughter plant confirmed that the trade with stolen horses was booming in Argentina. According to them, it was very easy to obtain new documentation for stolen horses. They claimed that a lot of veterinarians and policemen, who are responsible for issuing and verifying such documents, were involved in corrupt practices.

### **Liberation mission at the Lamar slaughter plant, February 2013**

In February of 2013, a considerable number of stolen horses, which had been delivered with falsified documents, were recovered by their owners at the Lamar plant. On the weekend February 23/24<sup>th</sup>, the first stolen horses were discovered in the pens. The news spread quickly. On Monday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, many horse owners gathered at the gates of the slaughter plant, but the guards refused to let them in. On that day, 100 to 150 horses were slaughtered as usual. The lawyer of an Argentinean animal welfare organization intervened and managed to stop the slaughter process for 24 hours. The owners were subsequently allowed to enter the pens and look for their horses; provided they could prove the animals were in fact their property through documentation and pictorial evidence. In the pen of Lamar's main supplier Raul Onorato, 15 out of 30 horses were identified as stolen.

The incident of February 2013 was not an isolated case. In the past, there have been many reports in Argentinean media about stolen horses found at Lamar and other slaughter plants. In 2002, horse dealer Onorato was arrested together with a corrupt policeman, and official veterinarians (SENASA<sup>9</sup>) for dealing with stolen horses and sending them to slaughter. Until this day, the same people and authorities are involved in this business.

### **2013 Investigation**

In August of 2013, investigators returned to Argentina to collect evidence that stolen horses were routinely slaughtered to meet the European demand for horsemeat. Interviews with horse owners, policemen, veterinarians and government employees confirmed that horses are stolen on a large scale and then sent to slaughter. The

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<sup>9</sup> Veterinary authority (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria)





Investigators were also able to obtain documents which proved that stolen horses were found at Lamar and were then returned to their rightful owners.

The stolen horses saved from slaughter in February 2013 all had the brand mark of horse dealer Onorato, the brand mark “F” meaning “faena” (slaughter) as well as a slaughter ear tag. Most horses were not branded before, what made it easy for Onorato to mark them as his property. In Argentina, horses are not microchipped, which facilitates fraud. Dr Mario Lopez Oliva, former president of the Argentinean association of equine veterinarians AAVE (Asociación Argentina de Veterinaria Equina), confirmed that **traceability of horses cannot be guaranteed in Argentina.**



*Brand mark of horse dealer Onorato*



*Ear tag for slaughter horses, 2013*

Police officers, government employees and veterinarians confirmed that it is rare for transporters to arrive at a plant without any stolen horses on board, and that there is a black market for horses and documents. The trade with stolen horses is an organised crime. A former police officer of the department of cattle theft in the province of Buenos Aires confirmed high levels of corruption in the police force. He said: „It would be advisable for European consumers not to purchase horsemeat from Argentina as its origin cannot be secured. I am not saying that all horses are stolen, but it can be assumed that approximately 50% are.”

As the identification system for horses is deficient and stolen horses frequently enter slaughter plants, the risk of drug residues in Argentinean horsemeat is particularly high. Talking to veterinarians and polo horse owners, the investigators learned that Phenylbutazone is commonly used to treat race and polo horses.

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The investigators were able to purchase Phenylbutazone, which they received without a prescription and without any questions asked, despite the notice “*venta bajo receta*” (available only by prescription) printed on the label.

### **2015 Update**

Several Argentinean horse owners who were interviewed in 2013 confirmed that horses are still being stolen on a large scale. However, it was unclear if any owners were able to recover their horses in the past year. They stated that it had become very complicated for owners of stolen horses to gain access at Lamar. Additionally, the large paddocks behind the slaughter plant, where many stolen horses were found in 2013, are now kept completely empty. The plant apparently changed their procedure and the horses are now slaughtered immediately after arrival at the plant.

On April 5<sup>th</sup> 2015, investigators received an e-mail from a horse owner, Fernando Desena, who lives near the Lamar plant. In 2013, he had recovered his stolen mare from the holding pens of Lamar, one year after she had been taken. She was in devastating condition as she had been used as a “garbage horse”, pulling very heavy loads. At first Fernando did not even recognise the mare, she was emaciated and her whole body was covered with wounds. However, the mare recognised Fernando and immediately walked up to him.

Fernando informed the investigators that two month ago the same mare had been stolen for the second time. He was very upset, especially because she had a little, three month old foal. The thieves took only the mare and left the foal behind. Fernando filed a complaint with the local police authorities, but nothing happened. He is still searching for the mare, but has not much hope that she will ever reappear.



### INVESTIGATIONS & ADVOCACY



## Conclusion:

The follow up investigation in Argentina confirmed again that slaughter horses are not treated according to EU standards, neither during transport nor at the slaughter plant. **The main animal welfare concerns are:**

- Inadequate legislation for the protection of animals during transport and slaughter
- Very long transport distances (up to 1200 miles)
- Use of vehicles which are inappropriate for the transport of horses and hold high risks of injuries: no individual stalls, low trap-doors, lack of roof, no water system, etc.
- Long-distance transports without water, feed and rest
- Untrained personnel handling horses
- Emaciated and injured horses as well as pregnant mares in slaughterhouse pens
- Lack of shelter at the slaughter plant and no protection from sun and rain
- No veterinary care or emergency killing provided to horses in obvious distress
- Crowded conditions in slaughter plant pens leading to horses fighting
- Many violations at EU approved slaughter plants against EU Regulation 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing: slippery floors, lack of feed, rough handling, lack of shelter, no emergency killing of suffering horses, etc.

In addition to animal welfare concerns, **there is also a high risk of drug residues in horsemeat from Argentina.** Phenylbutazone can be bought without a prescription and is commonly used in sport horses, which are not excluded from slaughter. Additionally, Argentina has no reliable system of equine identification and horse theft is wide-spread. It can reasonably be assumed that a lot of Argentinean horsemeat is obtained from stolen horses with completely unknown origin. Traceability cannot be guaranteed.

Animals' Angels and their EU partner organizations Tierschutzbund Zurich and Animal Welfare Foundation are calling upon the EU Commission to ban all horse meat imports from Argentina.

## INVESTIGATIONS & ADVOCACY