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Editorial Content: news@texashorsetalk.com

Edited by Steven Long and National News Editor Carrie Gobernatz

Humane Society Says It Will Not Oppose Slaughter of Farm and Ranch Animals Despite Ag Interest Groups Claims

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[Equestrian Magazine Issues Stern Criticism to Breeders](http://www.equestrianmag.com/news/horse-slaughter-overbreeding-02-09.html) (<http://www.equestrianmag.com/news/horse-slaughter-overbreeding-02-09.html>)

By Steven Long

HOUSTON, (Horseback Magazine) - The nation's largest animal welfare organization has for the first time gone on the record to counter claims that it wants to end the slaughter of food animals.

Michael Markarian, executive vice president of Washington based Humane Society of the United States, emphatically countered the charge frequently made by agriculture groups that it wants nothing less than to end the slaughter of any animal for food, not just horses.

Asked Tuesday if HSUS is targeting the food animal industry for abolition Markarian was quick to respond.

"The answer is no," he told *Horseback Magazine* through a spokeswoman. "That is not our goal."

Agriculture groups from across the nation have zeroed in on HSUS as the boggy man in their war with animal welfare activists over horse slaughter. They say that the ultimate goal of the Society is to eliminate the killing of all food animals including cattle, sheep, goats, and swine.

"They have a simple goal, and that is to eliminate animal agriculture in this country," said South Dakota Rancher Troy Hadrick in a story in Tuesday's *Rapid City Journal*.

Such talk is sweeping the nation. Agriculture interests will soon take their battle to Congress and to state legislatures as legislation to end horse slaughter forever is brought up for debate and a vote.

In meeting after meeting, both large and small, farmers and ranchers are pointed to the Humane Society by industry leaders as the group most well funded and determined to end their livelihood and way of life. The result has been an emotional upheaval against the group coming from across rural America.

In the current Texas legislative session a fierce battle is expected over the issue. It will pit recreational horse owners and animal rescue operators against breeders, ranchers, and much of the horse industry itself.

Polling has consistently shown that an overwhelming majority of Americans oppose the slaughter of horses.

The industry is well funded and able to tap the deep pockets of the Farm Bureau, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raiser's Association, AQHA and others who have a vested interest in being able to recoup the costs of raising a horse with little market value. Selling a horse for slaughter enables a breeder to recover at least part of his costs for breeding a seemingly unwanted horse. In short, it's all about money and the ability to recover the investment made to breed the animal.

The battle could well be waged in multiple states all at once, as well as in Congress. Animal rights activists counter that there are no unwanted horses and most animals culled from breeding programs may be placed with the public if only given the chance. They say that it is a myth that old, frail, and ill horses are sold for slaughter as the slaughter advocates frequently claim. They say it's all about meat on the hoof, and there isn't much meat on a starving horse.

Yet the agriculture industry is fiercely determined to bring back slaughter plants that were outlawed and closed in Texas and Illinois during the past two years.

In fact, a bill has already been filed in South Dakota that would provide funding for a study to establish a horse slaughter industry in that state. Currently, there is no legal horse slaughter facility operating in the United States, although horses are shipped to Canada and Mexico to supply markets in Europe and Japan.

While the Humane Society has now gone on record saying it will not target animal agriculture for elimination, that doesn't mean it has embraced it either.

"Most animals raised for meat, eggs, and dairy products today suffer immensely on factory farms," said HSUS spokeswoman Heather Sullivan. "They are confined by the tens of thousands in warehouses where many of their natural instincts are frustrated and are generally treated like mere commodities as opposed to living, feeling individuals."

Sullivan said the organization welcomes animal lovers of all dietary persuasions, from vegans to confirmed carnivores.

"The Humane Society of the United States is a big tent organization -- we're comprised of vegetarians and meat-eaters alike. In fact, the vast majority of our members are not vegetarians," she said.

"We accept the fact that most Americans eat animals and we support efforts by individuals, corporations, voters and lawmakers (and what they) can do to help reduce the suffering of these animals. At the same time, while most Americans eat animals, they do not want to see them treated inhumanely. The industry can only be expected to go so far as the public wants it to go, and many standard industry practices today are clearly out of step with the sentiments of most Americans. This is where HSUS focuses the bulk of our farm animal resources.

While HSUS is not officially opposed to meat eating, it clearly isn't promoting it either, and in fact promotes alternatives.

"We support a variety of reasonable efforts to help reduce animal suffering. If consumers want to avoid eating animals, we'll provide them with the information they need to make that decision," Sullivan said. "If they want to reduce the number of animals they eat, we'll give them recipes and other useful information. And if they want to avoid products that cause the most animal suffering (e.g., switching from battery cage eggs to cage-free eggs), we applaud that too, and give them the info they need on where they can find those products. This is the range of motion for the bulk of the American public, and we are comfortable working in all of these ways."

Tel: 281-447-0772

FAX: 281-893-1029

Internet: news@texashorsetalk.com