

10. EQUINOPHAGY

The cost of maintaining a horse that is no longer useful (i.e., one that is lame, old, or otherwise unsuitable) is high—so high that some consider it prohibitive. According to a report from the Animal Welfare Council (2006), the cost of taking care of such a horse is \$2,340 per year. The animal could be expected to live another eleven years after its productive life, resulting in a cost that could exceed \$25,000. The Unwanted Horse Coalition estimated in 2007 that there were 170,000 unwanted horses in the U.S. Options for disposing of a horse include letting it die of starvation and neglect, euthanizing it, or sending it to an equine slaughterhouse. Starvation, as a form of cruelty, is prohibited by law, but becomes the default solution when owners are unable to care for the animals. Euthanizing and burying a horse is significantly more complex and expensive than disposing of smaller animals. There are currently no domestic equine slaughterhouses. Reliance on foreign slaughterhouses exposes the horses to stressful shipping and to conditions uncontrolled by U.S. laws regarding humane treatment of animals.

Until recently, there were three equine slaughterhouses in the United States, two in Texas and one in Illinois, but all three are now closed. According to a story by *Forbes* (January 2012), the mayor of Kaufman, Texas, had waged a twenty-year campaign to get the local horse slaughterhouse shut down. The company, Dallas Crown, had allegedly caused the local citizens enormous problems. It had installed a pump to force horse blood through the town's sewer system, but the pressure of the pump burst some pipes and sent the blood into citizens' bathtubs and bubbling up onto the streets. The company grounds contained open piles of offal, which attracted vultures and flies and gave off a stench that permeated local businesses and homes.

Outside the United States, when horses are slaughtered, they mostly are destined for human consumption. According to a 2008 report from the Alberta Equine Welfare Group, over one billion people in the world eat horsemeat. In 2005, China was by far the largest consumer, (421,620 metric tonnes). Other major consumers were Mexico (84.17 t), Italy (63.29 t), France (24.54 t), Australia (19.12 t), and Japan (15.84 t). In Britain and America, however, where horses are thought of more as pets, there is a strong social stigma against eating horses.

In countries where horsemeat is consumed, it is served in much the same way as beef: as steaks, sausages, smoked and sliced for sandwiches, and so forth. Basashi is a form of Japanese sashimi: thin slices of raw horsemeat. Equine meat has somewhat higher nutritional value for humans than beef.