

The horse processing plant that almost opened

By Larry Hyslop



The plant has been closed for over a year. Photo by Jeri Clausing/AP

It is not easy opening a horse processing plant (slaughter house). Between the arson, litigation and an administration that wishes it would go away, it is tough to open a business.

I last wrote about the Valley Meat Company of Roswell, New Mexico on June 22 of this year. Since that time, much has happened to this business trying to open the first United States horse processing plant since the last one was forced closed in 2006. The company converted its cattle slaughter operation to a horse operation and plans on selling processed horse meat for human consumption and to zoos for animal food.

In 2006, the last three slaughterhouses were forced to close when Congress banned the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) from paying for inspectors of horse meat. The plants could sell no horse meat since all processed meat must be inspected.

At the end of June 2013, the USDA inspected the Valley Meat Company and cleared it to open, six months after the company sued the USDA for dragging its feet on issuing such a permit. The USDA stated they were legally obligated to issue the permit, although the Obama administration opposes horse slaughter and wants the congressional ban reinstated.

The processing plant was scheduled to open on August 5, but on July 27 someone jumped the plant's fence and poured accelerant over the refrigerator unit's compressors. The ensuing fire was put out by the Roswell fire department and an investigation has not officially termed it arson but showed it was man caused.

As it turned out, working compressors were not needed, since a U.S. District Judge issued a restraining order against the company. The lawsuit was brought by the Humane Society of the United States and other groups.

In the lawsuit filed against Valley Meat Company and the USDA, the groups said the USDA failed to do the proper environmental studies before issuing the Valley Meat Company its permit. They feel the plan should undergo public review through the NEPA process.

The USDA and Valley Meat Company stated that the groups presented no evidence of the need for a NEPA study. They feel the groups are merely trying to delay the plant's opening until Congress passes a ban on horse slaughter.

Robert Redford, New Mexico's former Gov. Bill Richardson, current Governor Susana Martinez and the state attorney general all oppose the plant's opening. Meanwhile, five other companies around the U.S. also are trying to open their own horse processing plant. The games go on.

Elko Daily Free Press, "Nature Notes", 8/10/2013
© Gray Jay Press, Elko, NV

Return to [Elko Nature Notes](#)