Vervolg op onderzoek: De wrede waarheid achter paardenvlees in Nederland

Medicijnresten in paardenvlees uit de V.S., Canada, Mexico, Uruguay en Argentinïe

1. Horse meat from USA, Canada and Mexico

After the closure of all horse slaughterhouses in the United States in 2007, the number of US horses transported to Canada and Mexico for slaughter increased significantly. However, horses are not purposefully bred for human consumption in the United States. US horses thus regularly receive substances that would not be allowed for use in animals that will later enter the human food chain. One of the drugs commonly administered to US horses is *Phenylbutazone*. Often referred to as *Bute*, it is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (*NSAID*) for the short-term treatment of pain and fever in animals.[1] ***Phenylbutazone* is not permitted to be used in the EU in animals intended for the food chain.** No Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) has been set for *Phenylbutazone* residues, meaning that any detection in food-producing animals is considered a violation. According to EU legislation, treatment of horses with *Phenylbutazone* must be recorded in their "horse passport", resulting in the definitive exclusion of the animals from slaughter for human consumption. *Phenylbutazone* can cause severe adverse effects in humans such as suppression of white blood cell production and aplastic anaemia, especially in children.[2] It is also suspected to be a carcinogenic.

Many horses in the United States, especially race and performance horses, receive *Bute* and other drugs. As soon as they can no longer perform, they are sold at auctions and transported for slaughter to Canada and Mexico. The New York Times reported extensively on this on December 8, 2012.[3]

The report of *the Food and Veterinary Office of the EU (FVO)* about an inspection in Mexico in 2010[4] notes that the Mexican authorities can give no guarantee that the horse meat exported to the EU is free of drugs. The horse's last owner (horse trader) must simply sign an affidavit stating that the horse was given no substances prohibited in the EU in the last six months. The US agencies assume no responsibility for the authenticity and reliability of these statements. They are also not verified by the Mexican authorities.

A renewed inspection of the FVO in 2011[5] in Mexico reached the following conclusion: **"The guarantees given on horse meat exports to the EU are insufficient to guarantee that equivalent standards to those provided for by EU legislation are applied."** Several of the substances banned in the EU were not tested for at that time at all; e.g. *Phenylbutazone* in horse meat. Overall, the number of tests was evaluated by the FVO as limited, and some of the test procedures were not recognized by the EU. As a result, horsemeat from Mexico is subject to special import conditions: Each import consignment of horse meat must be tested for residues of veterinary medicines upon entry into the EU.[6]

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenylbutazone
[2] http://www.veterinaryirelandjournal.com/Links/PDFs/CE-Large/CELA_Dec_2010.pdf.pdf
[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/sports/drugs-injected-at-the-racetrack-put-europe-off-us-horse-meat.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
[4] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2639
[5] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2862
[6] http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/bips/docs/special_import_conditions.pdf

The FVO report from another inspection in Mexico in June 2012[7] states: "The systems in place for identification, the food chain information and in particular the **affidavits concerning the non-treatment for six months with certain medical substances, both for the horses imported from the US as well as for the Mexican horses are insufficient to guarantee that standards equivalent to those provided for by EU legislation are applied**. This is mainly due to the absence of verification by competent authorities of the validity and authenticity of the affidavits…"

In Canada, residues of substances prohibited in the EU in horse meat are also a problem that the EU is well aware of. The FVO report from a 2010 inspection[8] in Canada states: "**Controls of veterinary drugs used in horses and residue controls were not considered to be satisfactory**."

The last owner of the horse must sign a written statement (Equine Information Document - EID) and declare what drugs the horse was given during the last six months. In many cases, however, the last owner is the horse trader and **no authority, either in the USA or Canada, verifies this written statement and can guarantee its reliability**. To work around this problem, there are several feedlots in Canada where US horses stay for six months before they are slaughtered (Bouvry's Feedlots in Alberta). The FVO report from 2011[9] states the following conclusion: "The national requirements implemented for the slaughter of domestic horses or imported horses kept under an approved horse feed lot programme, and the official controls performed give guarantees which are at least equivalent to those provided for in EU legislation. In contrast, **for those horses imported from the US for direct slaughter, the documentation received was not reliable**, **with verification of the data contained therein only being possible by means of residue testing**."

On 13.06.2012, laboratory tests conducted in Belgium detected doping agents in horse meat from Canada (Clenbuterol and *Phenylbutazone*). A warning to the other Member States to which the Canadian horse meat was sent to was issued by the EU. [10]

On 09.07.2012, the *US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)* issued a warning letter to slaughter horse trader Andio, after one of the horses he shipped to the *Viande Richelieu* plant tested positive for *Phenylbutazone.* [11]

On 11.12.12, the *Canadian Horse Defence Coalition (CHDC)* released proof of racehorse *Silky Shark* being slaughtered despite having been treated with *Phenylbutazone* earlier. [12]

On 01.03.2013, laboratory tests conducted in Switzerland detected *Phenylbutazone* in horse meat from Canada[13].

[7] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2958
[8] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2764
[9] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2836
[10] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/rasff-window/portal/index.cfm?event=notificationDetail&NOTIF_REFERENCE=2012.1078
[11] http://www.fda.gov/ICECI/EnforcementActions/WarningLetters/2012/ucm313462.htm
[12] http://canadianhorsedefencecoalition.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/proof_of_cfia_failure_dec_11_2012.pdf
[13] http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/Schmerzmittel-in-Pferdefleisch-in-der-Schweiz-nachgewiesen/story/19326455

On 29.03.2013, a *Toronto Star* investigation proved that Canada's food inspection system has serious flaws when dealing with the thousands of racehorses sent to slaughter for human consumption. The former racehorse *Backstreet Bully* was slaughtered in Québec, although he had been given powerful drugs that are potentially dangerous for humans, *Phenylbutazone* among others. The horse's identification paper had been falsified.[14]

On 24.05.2013, the *Toronto Star* once more reports that drugged horses are slipping through the Canadian food system and that the horse "passport" (EID) Canada relies on is open to fraud and error.[15]

The CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) has a bulletin on *Phenylbutazone* on its website. Consumers are reassured with the claim that Canadian horse meat is regularly tested, and the CFIA has a zero-tolerance policy for *Phenylbutazone* in food products.[16] But how then is it possible that *Phenylbutazon*e residues were detected in Canadian horse meat tested in Europe?

2. Horse meat from Argentina

On February 15th, 2013, three polo-horses were stolen in the province of Buenos Aires and it is very likely that they were sent for slaughter, which frequently happens in Argentina[17]. Their owner confirms that all three were given *Phenylbutazone* in the same year before they were stolen, as one stallion had recently been gelded, another had an infection and the mare had an ankle inflammation.

In Argentina, most veterinary medicinal products are sold directly to the horse owners by veterinarians or by veterinary retail outlets. *Phenylbutazone* can be bought without a veterinary prescription, although it is written on the label 'venta bajo receta' (available only with prescription). In August 2013, we covertly filmed a horse owner buying *Phenylbutazone* in a 'veterinaria' without being asked any questions.

In August 2013, we also spoke to different veterinarians in the province of Buenos Aires. One of them was Mario López Oliva, a specialist in sport horses and former president of the Argentiniean Equine Veterinary Association AAVE (Asociación Argentina de Veterinaria Equina). They all told us that *Phenylbutazone* degrades after a certain amount of time and did not consider it a dangerous drug. None of these veterinarians knew that a horse that was given *Phenylbultazone* once during his lifetime is never again allowed to be slaughtered for human consumption (which is written on the label of the drug). This leads to the assumption that controls in Argentina are not as strict as in Switzerland and the EU.

The report of the FVO about their inspection in Argentina in September 2011[18] notes that "a number of veterinary medicinal products, containing pharmacologically active substances for which there are no EU

[14] http://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/2013/03/29/star_investigation_ottawa_refuses_to_say_whether_drugtainted_horse_meat_entered_food_chain.html
[15] http://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/2013/05/24/star_investigation_drugged_horses_slipping_through_inadequate_food_system.html
[16] http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets/specific-products-and-risks/meat-and-poultry-products/horse-meat/eng/1331217628360/1331225704619
[17] See the report of our investigation about horse theft in August 2013
[18] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2809

MRLs (EU Maximum Residue Limits) for horse meat such as ***Phenylbutazone*, are authorised for horses 'not intended for human consumption' or only for 'sports' horses. However, there is currently no means to ensure that horses treated with such products are excluded from the food chain**." According to SENASA, a survey has been carried out to identify the number of sport horses slaughtered, but the results were not provided to the FVO inspectors. The fact that horse theft is common in Argentina and many of these stolen horses, which were never intended for human consumption, are sold directly for slaughter strongly increases the risk of drug residues in horse meat from Argentina. The FVO knows there are **"weaknesses in the current system regarding the identification and treatments of equidae destined to be slaughtered and exported to the EU for human consumption."**

As in the USA, the holder of the horses has to sign a sworn affidavit (Declaración Jurada para el Movimiento y Remision de Equidos a Faena), identifying the animal's markings and declaring the animal's treatment history in the six months preceding slaughter. The Declaración Jurada specifies that the animals have not been treated with drugs which are not authorised for use in food producing animals in Argentina and that, if authorised drugs have been used in that period, withdrawal periods have been observed. However, the FVO report 2011 states that the **affidavit does not cover the use of NSAIDs such as *Phenylbutazone*** and Dipyrone. Furthermore, the **Argentinean authorities do not verify authenticity or reliability of the sworn statements on veterinary treatments made by owners**.

The FVO mission in March 2011[19] detected some deficiencies concerning the presence of affidavits from the farmers in a collection centre for slaughter horses. In the collection centre visited, 5 to 10 % of the animals had been accepted without affidavits or not signed by the farmer.

According to the SENASA's 'Orden de Muestreo – Muestreo de residuos en equidos' (Order for sampling – Residue testing in equines), only **one sample has to be taken per 1700 horses** to be tested for *Phenylbutazone* (see annex).

The FVO report of September 2011 states that there is no effective mechanism in place to ensure that planned samples are actually taken and that deadlines for their submission to the laboratory and reporting of results are respected. "**These factors undermine the ability of SENASA to provide assurances regarding the residue status of animals and their products which are equivalent to those provided for in EU legislation."** And although procedures are in place which foresee follow-up investigations which are equivalent to those provided for in the EU legislation, these are not always followed in practice and are only initiated after lengthy delays. As a consequence, the source of residues is often not identified. The report notes that "there is currently no mechanism in place which could prevent these issues from continuing."

The inspection of the FVO in September 2011 reached the following conclusion: **"The current system of equine identification and maintenance of medicinal treatments records relies heavily on owner affidavits regarding the use of medicines which focus principally on a limited range of substances."**

At the time of the investigation 2011, there was no system in place for specific controls on the use of veterinary medicines on farms. The report notes that treatment records for the lifetime of all food producing animals will be introduced in 2012, to lessen the possibility that animals and their products intended for

[19] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2730

export to the EU will contain residues in excess of the levels allowed in EU legislation. However, many of the stolen horses that are sold for slaughter are sport or leisure horses that were never intended for human consumption. It is therefore highly probable they were given substances which are not permitted for slaughter horses.

3. Horse meat from Uruguay

In Uruguay, most veterinary drugs can be bought by the public without a veterinary prescription, with some few exceptions. *Phenylbutazone* is also of free sale. This situation differs from the requirements laid down in EU legislation.

According to the report of a FVO mission carried out in 2010[20], "some veterinary medicinal products authorised for use in food producing species contain active principles which do not have EU MRLs (e.g. Dipyrone, Fumagillin, *Phenylbutazone* or Triamcinolone) ". In the EU, they would not be permitted for food producing animals.

In the only horse collection centre visited during the FVO mission in 2009[21], no records of the treatment with veterinary medicinal products were kept. The report states that "**there were still some weaknesses in the system to document the respecting of the withdrawal periods for veterinary drugs**". The inspection in 2009 reached the following conclusion: "**Progress needs to be made regarding individual animal identification and some deficiencies related to official controls were seen in relation to horse meat production and animal welfare.**"

The report of the FVO mission in 2010 notes that "based on Resolution No 55 T/07, since the end of 2007, horses used for any sport activity (e.g. polo, jumping, racing, endurance) are banned from entering the food chain." However, a report of URUGUAY XXI (Investment and Export Promotion Institute) of 2012[22] states: "La producción de carne equina en Uruguay es una actividad residual de los diferentes usos de los animales (trabajo, competencias, placer), no existiendo la cría comercial con destino a la producción de carne como sí existe en algunos países, especialmente los europeos." As horses for competition are sport horses, these statements are contradictory.

The FVO report from 2010 states the following conclusion: "The effectiveness of the national residues control plan is compromised by some deficiencies related to risk-based planning, a **limited scope of testing for some substance groups, and weaknesses in laboratory performance**."

On-farm registers of veterinary treatments of horses are compulsory in Uruguay. In 2010, a new requirement was in the process of being developed which would result in each horse being accompanied by, in addition to the current documentation, an affidavit of the owner stating the absence of veterinary treatments in the six months prior to the sale for slaughter.

[20] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2513
[21] http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=2230
[22] http://www.uruguayxxi.gub.uy/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Sector%20Ecuestre.pdf

Horse meat is produced under poor animal welfare conditions in the USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay and also poses a health risk to consumers. These are two good reasons to stop the imports.