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Horsemeat imports from overseas

Urgent ban needed on imports of horsemeat sold under EU label

Animal welfare coalition calls on the European Commission for a ban on horsemeat imports to stop the torturous production in North and South America

Brussels, 24.7.2014. The international animal welfare coalition, formed by Tierschutzbund Zürich (Switzerland), Animal Welfare Foundation (Germany), Animals' Angels (USA), GAIA (Belgium), Eyes on Animals (Netherlands), L214 (France), supported by Eurogroup for Animals (Brussels), recently discussed with the European Commission the results of its long-term investigation into horsemeat production in the USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay responsible for 26'500 tons horsemeat imports. The report of almost 1000 pages shows systematic violations against EU and Swiss laws compromising animal health, animal welfare, food safety, consumer interests as well as distorting the level playing field for horsemeat producers in Europe. "Throughout the entire horsemeat production chain horses are systematically abused and EU legislation is being flouted at massive scale," says Reineke Hameleers, Director of Eurogroup for Animals. "The horsemeat is marketed with the EU seal of approval and only a ban on the import of horsemeat from these countries can put an end to the misery of the horses and safeguard consumer protection," she added.

Since 2012, investigative teams have carried out over a hundred control operations in the exporting countries. They investigated along the complete horsemeat production chain which includes

auctions, collecting stations, transport, export pens, feedlots and slaughterhouses. The findings of the investigations are unambiguous and devastating. In all exporting countries they documented blatant abuses in equal measure.

“No matter whether in the USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina or Uruguay, violations against animal welfare standards as adopted by the EU are the norm,” says Sabrina Gurtner, manager of the horsemeat project of TSB Zürich.

“Sick horses or those giving birth are left to their own devices. In the feedlots horses are kept without protection from the blazing sun or extreme winter temperatures. They are transported, including injured and weak animals, in inappropriate trucks without water and food over thousands of kilometres for hours or days at a time. They are rounded up by dogs, which attack and frighten the horses, or are mistreated by untrained personnel. Veterinary care and emergency slaughter of dying animals do not occur. They are slaughtered improperly, in Canada for example they are shot with a rifle,” she added.

The horsemeat is then sold as if it is produced by a “EU certified source“. Yet the usage of the EU label by importers and retailers is a deception of the consumer, since the EU certification applies only to the slaughterhouse.

The FVO, the competent EU authority for the inspection of the slaughter plants, has repeatedly informed the EU Commission that the systems in place regarding identification and medical treatment of horses are insufficient to guarantee EU standards. Particularly with regard to Canada, the USA, Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay, the FVO has raised concerns about traceability and the risk of drug residues in horsemeat. Horses from North and South America are often spent sport and leisure horses which are treated with drugs prohibited for animals whose meat is intended for human consumption. One of these drugs is Phenylbutazone, which is commonly used as a pain reliever and anti-inflammatory medicine. In Argentina and Uruguay, this drug is sold in pharmacies without prescription. In none of the investigated export countries, the medication for horses is documented in an equine passport, as required in the EU or Switzerland. “In the USA and Canada, the statement of the last owner is sufficient. This is usually the horse dealer,” confirms Sabrina Gurtner.

The animal welfare coalition principally criticizes that the production of horsemeat in jurisdictions outside the EU can neither be regulated nor controlled.

During a recent meeting the EU Commission indicated to take the arisen situation very seriously. The animal welfare coalition calls upon the Commission to take the strongest and most efficient measure at hand and ban the import of horsemeat from North and South America. “This can be done without any fear of violating

international trade law and WTO policy, as the case of the ban on seal products shows,” explains Reineke Hameleers.

For more information, please visit www.stop-horsemeat-imports.org.

Additional information

Animal welfare coalition:

Tierschutzbund Zürich (Switzerland), Animal Welfare Foundation (Germany), Animals’ Angels (USA), Eyes on Animals (Netherlands), GAIA (Belgium), L214 (France), supported by Eurogroup for Animals (Brussels).

The following investigative reports may be requested:

Dossier 2013; Dossier 2014; Argentina - Horsemeat from stolen horses

Films to the investigations:

2013: Horsemeat imports into Switzerland
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGX3vkL0iLY>)

2013: Argentina - Horsemeat from stolen horses
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zg_ltiC4llo)

2014: Horsemeat from torturous production
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38QHUr4yA0>)

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