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13 international animal welfare organisations call for a suspension of imports

European and Swiss importers deceive consumers with platform «Respectful Life»

New video footage shows ongoing torture of horses in North and South America

Brussels, Freiburg, Zurich, 12.6.2019 – Thirteen European, North and South American animal welfare organisations criticise the European and Swiss horsemeat importers. Their demand is that the import of horsemeat from torturous production be stopped. Since 2012, the animal welfare NGOs Tierschutzbund Zürich (Switzerland), Animal Welfare Foundation (Germany), For the Animals (Uruguay), Animals' Angels Inc. (USA) and the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition have been investigating the production of horsemeat overseas.

“New video footage proves that the horses are still systematically tortured. Injured or sick horses do not receive veterinary care. The horses are kept in the open, unprotected from pouring rain, permanent frost or blistering heat. Foals die at birth in the slaughterhouse pens”, criticises project manager Sabrina Gurtner, Animal Welfare Foundation.

“In 2013, after the first exposure of the cruelty to horses, all Swiss supermarkets ceased the import and sale of horsemeat. In 2015, the EU also suspended the imports of horsemeat from Mexico and since then, several supermarkets in the Netherlands and Belgium also stopped selling cruelly produced horsemeat,” says Reineke Hameleers, director of Eurogroup for Animals in Brussels. With the marketing online platform 'Respectful Life', the importers' associations FEBEV (Belgium) and VPI (Switzerland) are now trying to revive the import of horsemeat from overseas.

The online portal 'Respectful Life' is managed by the Belgian meat federation FEBEV. Participants of the project are primarily slaughterhouses from overseas and importers from Europe. FEBEV is cooperating with two researchers of the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. “FEBEV, VPI and their members deceive the consumers by referring to the research of the scientists as an audit and verification of animal welfare standards in horsemeat production”, criticises Sabrina Gurtner.

Additionally, the Swiss association of horsemeat importers VPI has commissioned the global company Société Générale de Surveillance, SGS, to conduct audits in order to certify the production sites in North and South America. “Fact is, as shown by documents and certificates, that only the management system is certified but not animal welfare in the production. With these certificates, the consumers and clients of the VPI, like butcheries and restaurants, are deceived”, states Sabrina Gurtner.

The recent video footage from 2018/2019 shows extensive animal cruelty. At the Bouvry slaughterhouse in Alberta, Canada, the horses are kept in the open with temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius. “In 2015, pregnant mares were kept separately. Today they are mixed with other horses. In winter, the foals freeze to death at birth”, describes Sabrina Gurtner. Thousands of horses are kept in industrial pens, so-called feedlots. “They are fattened

until they get sick. Roughage, dry and clean resting areas are not available or insufficient. Hoof care and veterinary treatment of injuries and diseases are not administered”, explains Sabrina Gurtner the systematic neglect. The horses brought to these feedlots from the USA have to remain in these pens and endure these cruel conditions for six months. This quarantine time is required by the EU.

For South America, the animal welfare organisations paint a similar picture. Sick horses or those with severe open wounds or broken legs are left untreated. During transport, horses are abused with sticks and electric prods. The origin of the horses is often unknown. “Where a horse comes from and which drugs have been administered is answered by the last owner. That is usually the slaughter buyer», explains Sabrina Gurtner.

The footage also shows how the slaughterhouses prepare themselves for announced audits. Pregnant and injured horses are removed from the slaughterhouse premises prior to the inspections by Respectful Life, the SGS or the EU. Presented are only a small number of healthy horses. “These deceitful tactics were criticised in the latest audit report of the EU on horsemeat production in Uruguay. Too few or no horses were present during the audit and it was not possible to check the slaughterhouses in normal operation”, says Sabrina Gurtner. The audit report raised serious questions about animal welfare and traceability of the horses.

The coalition of the international animal welfare organisations therefore calls for an immediate suspension of the import of horsemeat from torturous production and for an end to the consumer deception by the supporters of the online platform 'Respectful Life'.

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