

Equine collection centres + slaughterhouses

Report on site visits in Argentina and Uruguay



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Preface

This report reflects the findings (visual observations and measurements of environmental parameters) at the time of the follow-up company visits, which lasted a few hours per company. The situation (animals, staff and infrastructure) was studied at the time of the visit and the observations made were then tested against standards, norms etc. relating to animal welfare. In addition, photographic and video material was gathered during the site visits in order to be analysed afterwards.

During the 14-day tour of Argentina and Uruguay, 5 slaughterhouses (of which 2 for the first time) and 2 collection centres were visited.

The site visit was conducted by Bert Driessen and Jos Van Thielen of the Animal & Welfare research group, who have many years of experience in the field of animal welfare and behaviour, and more specifically in relation to the monitoring of animals during their transport to and stay at slaughterhouses.

Programme

The route began in Uruguay, with visits to the slaughterhouse of Sarel and Clay, which account for 90% of horse slaughtering in Uruguay, as well as to an equine collection point/centre. This was followed by visits to 3 additional slaughterhouses and a collection centre in Argentina.

Friday 27 July 2018

Visit/audit of Sarel slaughterhouse (Uruguay)

Saturday 28 July 2018

Visit/audit of equine collection centre in Paraje Chileno Grande (c. 300 km from Montevideo, Uruguay)

Monday 30 July 2018

Visit/audit of Clay slaughterhouse (Uruguay)

Wednesday 1 August 2018

Visit/audit of Infriaba slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Friday 3 August 2018

Visit/audit of Solemar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Saturday 4 August 2018

Visit/audit of Olavarria equine collection centre (Argentina)

Monday 6 August 2018

Visit/audit of Lamar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Tuesday 7 August 2018

Meeting with Senasa (Argentina)

Summary and conclusion

At the end of July 2018, two researchers from the Animal&Welfare research group visited 2 slaughterhouses in Uruguay, namely, the Sarel and the Clay slaughterhouses (together responsible for 90% of horse slaughtering in Uruguay). Furthermore, one equine collection centre in Uruguay was visited. In the first week of August 2018, the same researchers visited 3 Argentine slaughterhouses (Infriba, Solemar and Lamar) and an Argentine collection centre next to a loading area in the fields. The two researchers are experts in the area of animal welfare at agricultural businesses, during transport and at the slaughterhouse. At each company visited (both slaughterhouses and collection centres), the company executives and staff collaborated fully and granted access to all their premises. At the request of the research team, the horse driving, stunning and bleeding was demonstrated at each operational company, so as to be able to form a good overview of the expertise and infrastructure available. The Clay slaughterhouse (Uruguay) was not operational during the audit due to substantial infrastructure works.

A systematic testing of animal welfare (based on the Five Freedoms) was conducted of the infrastructure in place. The arrangements for unloading the animals, moving them to the temporary waiting areas, driving them to the stunning area and provisions in that area were inspected systematically. The existing infrastructure was subjected to critical visual inspection so as to be able answer a number of questions. Is all the necessary infrastructure present to allow for an animal-friendly treatment of the horses? The floor staff were observed during several hours in order to assess their skills and expertise in handling horses (in what are not natural circumstances for the animals) and to answer the following questions: Did the staff have sufficient skills to handle the horses in a speedy and animal-friendly manner? Is the staff able, sufficiently aware and experienced to accurately estimate potential problem situations and handle them competently? During the site visits, objectively measurable and appropriate parameters regarding animal welfare such as light intensity, temperature, air flow, ambient noise, disturbing shafts of light and shadow spots were systematically recorded at various spots at the companies.

At both of the collection centres visited, the research team were shown the way horses are driven from the surrounding fields to a collection point. The way in which the animals are driven by the gauchos was amply demonstrated: it all took place calmly, with non-verbal cues and without driving aids, and with obvious familiarity with the horses' natural behaviour and bodily signals. The horses are kept for a few days to weeks in large fields of between a few dozen to more than a hundred hectares. On these extensive fields, the animals can graze and seek shelter under trees or rows of trees. Fresh water is also available. The loading ramp or quay at the collection centre is made of local materials, namely, earth and wood. This means the horses are not exposed to any artificial textures (cement or metal) when they enter the trailer via the loading quay. In addition, the earth ensures that the horses have a good grip on the loading quay when they are driven along, and there is less likelihood that they might slip and sustain injuries as a result. The side panels of the loading quay are made of wood without any sharp protrusions. The horses are driven 4 or 6 at a time along the loading quay to the trailer. The drivers use sticks with little flags on them for the purpose (Figure 1). When the horses are loaded onto the trailers, the drivers continue to take account of the horses' bodily signals.

The research team was able to observe that at the companies they had visited on a previous occasion (Sarel, Clay and Lamar), the recommendations of the earlier site visits were taken to heart and the points needing improvement had been addressed. Thus, the restraint boxes in the slaughtering area of the slaughterhouses were separated by sandwich panels so that there would no longer be any disturbing noises coming from the slaughtering area that would cause stress to the horses in the restraint box. The result is that the (pneumatic) bolt gun could be used under more calm circumstances, which results in a more effective stunning. However, during the visits in July-August 2018, a few additional points needing improvement were identified in order to promote the speed and comfort of the work (e.g. driving the animals) and thereby reducing stress for the animals. The slaughterhouse managers were open to the

advice given regarding the points for improvement, such as reducing disturbing noise in the slaughterhouse, optimizing the lighting and minor infrastructure works (roughening the floor, changing the colour of the floor gratings etc.) (Figure 2). According to local legislation, the horse must be given a shower shortly before slaughtering, in order to reduce the amount of dust in their coats (Figure 3). Showering is stressful for the horses. Therefore the shower should start with a very fine mist, after which the intensity of the spray can be gradually increased. In July 2018 there was an unusual amount of rain, making the ground in the waiting area soggy. Fresh drinking water is provided in the waiting areas of each slaughterhouse (Figure 4). The Lamar slaughterhouse had anticipated the situation by covering the waiting area with a metal structure. During the visit, recommendations were made about how to handle injured animals. When such animals arrive at the slaughterhouse, they should be separated, inspected and if necessary moved up for emergency slaughtering. In addition, before loading and transporting the horses, the hauliers should carefully assess whether such horses meet the conditions for “fitness to travel”.

During the visit to the slaughterhouses and collection centres, the research team received questions from the sector as regards the best possible design of the trailers for transporting horses in South America. The questions focused on the type of floor, the doors/gates and the height of the trailers. The sector intends to further optimize the trailers for horse transport based on scientific information.

On the last day of the team’s stay in South America, a symposium was organized at Senasa. The researchers gave a presentation about the audits, the underlying reasons for them and any points of concern. This was followed by a discussion of the various aspects/views regarding the transport and slaughtering of horses. The conclusion to be drawn is that the Argentine government is open to making the recommended improvements.

In order to increase the impact of this evaluation, while remaining within the framework of self-regulation, it is recommended that the monitoring of slaughterhouses be intensified by continually providing the research team with video images of critical points at the slaughterhouses, so that they may analyse such images on a random basis. The Lamar slaughterhouse has taken a pioneering role in this. The availability and analysis of such video images can also serve to counter the criticism that animal welfare is monitored only during the periods when the scientists are physically present in the slaughterhouses concerned.

The final goal of the scientific information gathered should give rise to further refinement of the HOMEFE specifications. In addition, there is growing commitment to handle animals with greater awareness. It is important that the culture of animal welfare that is already present be considered self-evident by the management and floor staff, and that it be subject to ongoing improvement. The transfer of knowledge about animal welfare from Western Europe to local authorities, such as universities and supervisory bodies (Senasa) can and should therefore be further developed and intensified.

As a general conclusion, we can state that in the light of the visits over the past 3 years and of the on-site observations, there is positive development in Argentina and Uruguay in the area of animal welfare during the collection, transport and slaughter of horses. We have noted increasing involvement and understanding on the part of all actors involved: slaughterhouses, collection centres, supervisory body (Senasa) and universities.

Druk <Ctrl + Alt + Shift + S> om het taakvenster met stijlen weer te geven

Photographic material



Figure 1: The drivers use a stick with a flag on the end or a bottle containing marbles as an aid during driving.



Figure 2: The transfer from the driving corridor to the shoot box has a grey, metal crosswise stripe that halt the horses while walking.



Figure 3: Showering just before slaughter, a legal requirement.



Figure 4: Fresh drinking water in the waiting area.