



Respectful Life

First Report 2016 – 2021

April 2021

Methodology

Since 2016, a team from KU Leuven (KUL) made a number of visits to the main third countries that export horse meat. The team from KUL consists of Professors Bert Driessen and Jos Van Thielen, and also Liesbeth Vermeulen, who studied the situation in Argentina closely in 2016 and 2017. As researchers, Bert Driessen and Jos Van Thielen are also members of the Dier&Welzijn (Animal&Welfare) study group. They have several years' experience in the field of animal welfare and behaviour, and specifically in monitoring of animals during transportation and in slaughterhouses.

The aim of their research is to assess the level of animal welfare and its evolution, both in slaughterhouses and during transportation and in collection centres. This assessment was carried out through visual observations and also by analysing objectively measurable parameters (temperature – ambient lighting – ambient noise – humidity etc.) to have the most objective possible view of the horses' welfare. For those companies that were visited several times, the visits also had a monitoring element, to verify that the researchers' recommendations had been implemented.

Observations were made covering multiple aspects at the sites: horses' waiting conditions in collection centres and in pens, the loading process, transport conditions, the unloading process, the slaughterhouse infrastructure, staff competence and skills, moving animals to the stunning area, stunning and slaughtering.

Although the study was financed by the sector, it was carried out completely objectively and independently. All the information in this document is available in the KUL reports (<http://www.respectfullife.com/>)

Background

The first visit to Argentina by KUL took place in November 2015. This was the starting-point for the design of the Respectful Life project and an initial analysis of the situation in Argentina was made at this time. The researchers from the KUL wrote about this in [their first report](#):

- Argentina is a country with vast areas used for livestock farming. Both breeders and the workers responsible for managing the animals at work show high levels of skill in managing cattle and horses. As a result, animals are transported rapidly and in calm conditions. Horses benefit from the extensive farming practices in Argentina.
- No intolerable animal welfare violations attributable to slaughterhouses were observed during the visit. Companies provided regular training for their staff and kept detailed records of this. Self-monitoring documents are completed regularly, and adjustments are made on the basis of these. At least one animal welfare manager appointed by the slaughterhouse manager was present in each slaughterhouse. Furthermore, the staff in each of the slaughterhouses visited had undergone basic training in animal welfare and management of horses.
- The trailers used to transport the animals were compartmentalised and equipped with anti-slip floors.
- Public authorities, particularly SENASA, are ever-present. Both slaughterhouses and animal transportation were supervised and certified by SENASA. It was clear from interviews with senior staff at SENASA in Buenos Aires that animal welfare is important for the Argentine authorities.

History

Year	Dates	Countries	Sites visited
2016	31/10 to 04/11	Argentina Uruguay	- Three slaughterhouses – Lamar (AR), Clay (UY) and Sarel (UY) - One collection centre (AR)
2016/2017	November 2016 March 2017 June 2017 October 2017	Argentina Uruguay	- Three slaughterhouses – Land-L (AR), Lamar (AR) and Sarel (UY) - Twenty-three collection centres (AR and UY) - Twenty-three transports
2018	27/07 to 07/08	Argentina Uruguay	- Five slaughterhouses – Lamar (AR), Infriba (AR), Solemar (AR), Clay (UY) and Sarel (UY) - Two collection centres (AR and UY) - Meeting with SENASA
2019	08/04 to 12/04	Canada USA	- Two slaughterhouses – Fort Macleod (CA) and Richelieu (CA) - Two feedlot centres (CA and USA) - One collection point (CA) - One transported load
2019	02/11 to 08/11	Argentina Uruguay	- Four slaughterhouses – Land-L (AR), Lamar (AR), Clay (UY) and Sarel (UY) - Three collection centres (AR and UY) - Meeting with SENASA
2020	/	/	- No visits due to the travel restrictions imposed in the framework of Covid 19

AR: Argentina, UY: Uruguay, CA: Canada, USA: United States

General conclusions

- Horse behaviour cannot be understood and explained unless it is known how the animal experiences its environment => it is important to study the horse's environment at the various stages in an **objective and scientifically tested way**.
- During each visit, the researchers received **cooperation from the managers** and staff working for the companies involved, and were given **access to all the facilities**. Slaughterhouse managers are generally willing to accept suggestions on possible areas for improvement.
- On a year by year basis:
 - **2016:** "none of the three slaughterhouses or the corralling sites was found to enact an unacceptable violation of the welfare of the animals. Nevertheless, the KUL professors made proposals for improvements to reduce the time needed to carry out the operations (for example, moving the animals) and to implement them more easily so as to reduce the stress felt by the horses."
 - **2017:** The aim this year was to follow up the horses over time: from the collection location, then during transportation up to arrival at the slaughterhouse and slaughter. A further aim was to observe seasonal changes (temperature, humidity etc.) and their effects on the horses. Three slaughterhouses were therefore studied and these were visited four times. Two collection centres and two transports were also studied for each slaughterhouse in each quarter. "Each slaughterhouse involved in the study has made adjustments based on

recommendations made in the course of the scientific research (November 2016 - October 2017) and a previous work visit (2015). This is a good start towards optimizing the slaughtering process in terms of animal welfare and production efficiency. Every slaughterhouse has a suitable team on site. Attention needs to be given to providing regular training for the slaughterhouse staff who are responsible for working with live animals. The observations suggest that norms of good animal welfare are being complied with and that the stakeholders involved are open to the suggested improvements.”

- **2018:** “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.”
- **2019**
 - Canada “the animals were properly driven to the restraint box, stunned and bled. Nevertheless, the researchers suggested points of improvement to promote the speed and ease of the work (e.g. driving the animals) and thus reduce stress among the horses.”
 - South America: “During the years when they made their observations, the researchers/auditors noted various adaptations and improvements in both the infrastructure and the handling of the animals (and the human-animal interaction). The research team was able to observe that at all the companies they had visited on a previous occasion (Lamar, Sarel, Clay and Land L), many recommendations of the earlier site visits have been taken to heart and the points needing improvement have been addressed.”
- In general, we can conclude that based on the visits carried out in the past four years and the observations made on location, **there have been clear positive changes in Argentina and Uruguay in terms of animal welfare during collection, transportation and slaughter of horses**. All the actors involved are more aware of this and engaged with it: slaughterhouses, collection centres, supervisory bodies (Senasa) and universities.

Recommendations

During their visits, the researchers from KUL issued a series of on the spot recommendations for improving horse welfare. These were all based on their observations and relevant experience. We show in blue how the sector has responded to these recommendations and what has been done during the past five years:

- Recommendations were made on the way injured animals are managed. On arrival at the slaughterhouse, these animals should be isolated, inspected and taken for emergency slaughter if appropriate. It is also the responsibility of the horse carrier to judge whether they meet the ‘fitness to travel’ criteria before loading and transportation. Animals that are unsuitable to be transported must not be transported. Horse traders and carriers are not yet aware that horses must meet certain conditions in order to be transported. The presence of foals in the waiting areas and corrals on the slaughterhouse site. Recording of results for each trailer that arrives with horses. It would also be helpful to communicate these results to the carriers and suppliers. => Need for concrete instructions.

Action: **design a poster on Fitness to travel intended for slaughterhouses and carriers (2020)**

- Intensified monitoring in slaughterhouses, including camera recordings at critical points. These images should be available to the inspection team for analysis on a randomised basis.

Action: set up a system of cameras in slaughterhouses and discuss access to these videos for the research team from KUL. (2021)

- Improve the Respectful Life specifications, for slaughterhouses and also for collection centres (“A checklist of requirements that a collection centre must meet is a tool for both collection centre owners, so that they can determine themselves whether their collection centre is adequate, and for slaughterhouses that wish to ensure that the collection centres meet certain quality standards”). The use of a single checklist limits any potential dispute among the various stakeholders.

Action: adapt the Respectful Life specifications on the basis of the conclusions of the KUL researchers (2020) and set up an audit system together with the certification company SGS (2021)

- There needs to be a greater commitment to improving awareness of the treatment of animals. The animal welfare culture is already established here. This should be viewed as self-evident by managers and staff on location, and it should be continuously developed. That is why the process of transferring the animal welfare culture from Western Europe to local authorities such as universities and supervisory bodies should be encouraged and intensified. It is recommended to organise regular training for carriers and slaughterhouse staff who come into contact with live animals.

Action: during each visit, the researchers from KUL will study the working practices of staff who interact with live horses. Their observations will help the companies to adapt the training given to their staff (2016 to 2021). Meetings have also taken place with the Argentine authorities to discuss this (2018 and 2019).

- Transport: optimise opening of rear doors and adapt cattle trailers so that they meet the needs of horses, specifically in terms of trailer height, the nature of the trailer floor, door height and animal density => it is necessary to determine a set of requirements for these trailers.

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- Reduction of noise in slaughterhouses. A calm environment is important for both people and animals. The acute noises caused by contact between metal and metal or metal and concrete are particularly problematic.

Action: place rubber or insulation material in most participating slaughterhouses where this is necessary. A number of slaughterhouses have also introduced strict separation between areas housing live animals and those containing slaughtered animals, so that the horses arriving in the stun bay do not hear the noises of the slaughterhouse. (2016 to 2021)

- Improving the showering system for horses: a low-pressure shower that starts automatically and produces a fine spray.

Action: the Sarel slaughterhouse has implemented this suggestion. This system can serve as an example for others (2019)

- Providing a shelter in the waiting area (this could be a roof or trees or bushes) and pay attention to the condition of the ground. It is important to have a shelter to protect horses from bad weather

or provide shade (for example: trees in the horse collection area). Efforts should be paid to ensure that there is no mud and the soil is well drained to remove excess water.

- **Action: a number of slaughterhouses now have covered waiting areas, either with solid or mesh roofs. Fast-growing trees have also been planted (2016 to 2021).**
- Adapting infrastructure: ground cover, altering the colour of grids on the ground or partitions, optimised lighting, closed roofs and walls to avoid sunlight on the ground etc.

Action: all the establishments visited since 2016 have implemented the various recommendations on adapting infrastructure that were suggested by the KUL researchers. (2016 to 2021)

- Moving horses appropriately with no contradictory signals. The driver of the vehicle or person moving the horses should understand the signals made by horses during unloading and transportation and adjust his own actions accordingly.

Action: see the point on training above.