

Horse slaughterhouses in Argentina and Uruguay

Report on online monitoring



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Table of contents

- 1 Participating companies.....4
- 2 Camera infrastructure.....4
- 3 General findings and observations5
- Summary and conclusion.....6

Preface

As a result of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, it was not possible to conduct follow-up visits at the various horse slaughterhouses that are participating in the Respectful Life project. The focus of the project is horse welfare, and in particular in the slaughterhouse environment. The participating slaughterhouses of Argentina and Uruguay have therefore given the Animal & Welfare research group at the KU Leuven access to the online monitoring of camera images at the slaughterhouse site.

The various horse slaughterhouses were monitored at various times (which were unannounced). The monitoring took place by means of visual online observations via streamed camera images. The findings were analysed in terms of animal welfare and the animal-friendly treatment of horses. An individual analytical report was prepared for each slaughterhouse, stating and explaining the findings and observations and listing a number of points for improvement or points requiring attention. This report provides an overview of the main points requiring attention.

What is presented here are thus the findings from the monitoring of the horse slaughterhouses in Argentina and Uruguay.

For the purposes of this report, a total of more than 235 hours of visual material was monitored.

The online monitoring was conducted by Jos Van Thielen of the Animal & Welfare research group, who has 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 time spent in slaughterhouses.

The screening was conducted, animal welfare assessed and recommendations made in complete objectivity and independence.

1 Participating companies

The online monitoring took place during the period between 1 July 2021 and 21 December 2021.

The participating companies are listed here in alphabetical order:

- Infriba SA slaughterhouse in Batán – Argentina
- Lamar slaughterhouse in Mercedes – Argentina
- Land L slaughterhouse in Córdoba – Argentina
- Sarel SA slaughterhouse in Montevideo – Uruguay
- Solemar Alimentaria SA slaughterhouse in Chimpay – Argentina

2 Camera infrastructure

The camera images available to the author of this report were monitored via online streaming at various unannounced times, followed up and assessed in terms of animal welfare.

This method of working seems to be a good alternative to the periodic follow-up visits of the various horse slaughterhouses that are participating in the Respectful Life project. By means of camera monitoring, an analysis was conducted of the treatment and handling of the horses to be slaughtered, on the basis of 5 degrees of freedom.

The set-up of the cameras allows the observer to form a good image of how the horses are treated and handled. The staff on the floor were not affected in their actions by the fact that they are being monitored at that point, since the monitoring occurred at random times without being announced.

With sufficient and well positioned cameras, it is possible to follow the entire process (from the waiting area to the shoot box).

For this monitoring method, the following locations should ideally be shown:

- The unloading quay and driving the horses to the waiting area
- The waiting area
- Driving passage to the restraint box
- The restraint box
- The space where the horse is bled

One limitation of this method is, however, that only visual data can be picked up (both the way in which the staff handle the horses and the behaviour and reactions of the animals). Sounds and other environmental parameters cannot be picked up via the streaming, and therefore cannot be included in this analysis. Nevertheless, this working method allows us, during times when site visits and monitoring are impossible, to make a good estimate of the animal welfare at the slaughterhouse in question.

The quality of the internet connection is also very important for this method. The streamed images must be fast and fluid.

3 General findings and observations

From the analysis of the various slaughterhouses, a number of points requiring attention can be identified. The intention must always be to handle the horses in an animal-friendly manner. Where this is done correctly, with respect for the signals given by the animals at the time and in accordance with the natural behaviour of the horses, their handling will be efficient and smooth. Here are a few points requiring attention that are important for animal-friendly handling of horses in a slaughterhouse environment:

- Handling the horses more calmly, both when unloading them and when driving them from the waiting area to the shoot box, is essential to ensuring that the horses enter the shoot box with less stress (so that the stunning can be carried out optimally).
- Be aware of the impact on the horses of the use of a driving aid. Avoid giving misleading or contradictory signals to the horses, and take account of horses' natural behaviour.
- A horse in the driving passage must be motivated to move forward, but should not be frightened. Don't use fear as a motivator to drive a horse forward.
- Persons who are in the line of sight of the live horses should ideally not wear white clothing. White stands out and is frightening to dichromatic animals. A person dressed in white attracts more attention from the horses. They will regard that person as a 'potential danger'. As a result, the horses will do whatever they can to follow the person dressed in white.
- A horse should not be left for an unnecessarily long time in the restraint box before being stunned. When a horse is driven into the restraint box, it must be restrained immediately and properly stunned. If this cannot take place immediately for certain reasons, the horse must be released from the restraint box so that it has contact with its fellow horses again.
- The operator of the shoot box must work in a very concentrated manner and ensure that the bolt gun is correctly positioned on the horse's forehead.
- There must always be a back-up stunning device within reach in the shoot box.

Summary and conclusion

During the online camera monitoring of the various slaughterhouses, the author of this report did not observe any significant infringements of animal welfare. A few points for improvement or recommendations were observed in each slaughterhouse and have been set out in an individual report to the slaughterhouses in question.

The method using camera streaming at unannounced times is a good and objective way to assess daily operations as regards the handling of the horses and the animal-friendly way in which this is done. It is a time-consuming method, however, because it requires many hours of online camera monitoring.

For the quality assurance of the RL project on the one hand, and for the ongoing monitoring and recommendations as regards animal welfare at the slaughterhouses and the staff concerned, this method is a good alternative to the physical periodic site visits.

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Disclaimer:

The Animal & Welfare group accepts no responsibility for any damage resulting from the implementation of the recommendations provided in this report.

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