

# Horse collection centre + slaughterhouses

Report on site visits in Argentina and Uruguay

februari 2022

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# 1 Preface

During a 14-day tour of Argentina and Uruguay, 5 slaughterhouses (Solemar, Lamar, Infriba, Sarel, Clay) and 1 collection centre (Equisur in Entre Rios) were visited. The primary goal was to accompany a pilot audit of a slaughterhouse and a collection centre in Argentina carried out by SGS. We took advantage of the opportunity to visit a few other horse slaughterhouses in Argentina and Uruguay as well.

The following report reflects the findings (visual observations) at the time of the follow-up company visits, which lasted a few hours per company. The assessment of animal welfare and behaviour is always conducted according to four parameters, namely the animal itself (genetics, stress, fatigue, etc.), the drivers (experience, character, etc.), the infrastructure and the environment (day-night, climate conditions, etc.). This means that an assessment of animal welfare and behaviour is always a snapshot and that the inspection must be repeated regularly. In addition, photographic and video material was gathered during the site visits in order to be analysed afterwards.

The visit was conducted by Bert Driessen, who has more than 20 years' 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 and cattle farms.

Bert Driessen wishes to thank the staff of the slaughterhouse for their hospitality and openness during the visit.

## 2 Programme

The travel programme began in Argentina with a visit to the Solemar slaughterhouse. This was followed by successive visits to a horse collection centre, the Lamar slaughterhouse and the Infriaba slaughterhouse. In Argentina, we accompanied an SGS auditor during a pilot audit of the Equisur horse collection centre in Entre Rios and the Lamar slaughterhouse. We then crossed the Río de la Plata in order to visit the Sarel and Clay slaughterhouses in Uruguay.

### **Monday, 7 February 2022**

Visit to/audit of Solemar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Visit to/audit of the horse collection centre at the site of the Solemar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

### **Tuesday, 8 February 2022**

Visit to/audit of the horse collection centre of the Equisur company in Entre Rios (Argentina)

Accompaniment of SGS audit

### **Wednesday, 9 February 2022**

Visit to/audit of Lamar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Visit to/audit of the horse collection centre at the site of the Lamar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Accompaniment of SGS audit

### **Friday, 11 February 2022**

Visit to/audit of Infriaba slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Visit to/audit of the horse collection centre at the site of the Lamar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

### **Monday, 14 February 2022**

Visit to/audit of Sarel slaughterhouse (Canelones Zabala Department, Uruguay)

Visit to/audit of horse collection centre at the site of the Sarel slaughterhouse (Uruguay)

### **Tuesday, 15 February 2022**

Visit to/audit of Clay slaughterhouse (Uruguay)

Visit to/audit of horse collection centre at the site of the Clay slaughterhouse (Uruguay)

## 3 Summary

### 3.1 The slaughterhouses

The visit to the Lamar slaughterhouse (Argentina) took place in the presence of an SGS auditor who was there to test an audit protocol that had been developed. The remaining slaughterhouses were visited without the presence of the SGS auditor. Each slaughterhouse visited was in operation at the time of the visit. The focus during the visit was on the animals, the staff (and their interaction with the horses), the infrastructure and the environment (including weather conditions). The following elements were observed at each slaughterhouse: the enclosures, the waiting area, the (driving to the) restraint box and the stunning process.

#### **The unloading quay**

A truck carrying horses was unloaded during the monitoring period at three slaughterhouses (Solemar, Sarel and Clay). The unloading process was observed. The horses were unloaded and driven calmly. When the vertical doors are opened, the horses must have time to check and explore the opening. As soon as the first horse goes through the door, the other horses leave the trailer as well. There is a raised unloading quay (at the same level as the trailer floor) at each location.

#### **The enclosures (or corrals)**

- Corrals where horses can be kept are to be found adjacent to the slaughterhouses. Given the small number of horses available, there were few if any horses in the corrals.
- The corrals are varied, ranging from a collection of fields to a fully covered structure. Artificial shelter (canopies) or natural shelter (trees) is available in the open corrals (= fields or paddocks). Although attention has been paid to planting natural shelter in the past few years, more trees can still be planted. Owing to possible fire hazards in periods of drought (and fire passing from tree to tree), the distance between the trees must be sufficient.
- Only adult horses were observed in the corrals (and in the waiting areas).

#### **The waiting area**

- Shortly before slaughtering, the horses are driven from the corrals towards the waiting area. Given the low numbers, in some slaughterhouses the horses are not kept in the corrals, but driven to the waiting area immediately after unloading to then be slaughtered (= at the most a few hours later).
- The location of the waiting area in relation to the restraint box varies from site to site. In some slaughterhouses, the waiting area is close to the restraint box. At other sites, there is a longer driving corridor between the waiting area and the restraint box. The waiting areas are covered and drinking water is available.
- There were a limited number of horses at each slaughterhouse owing to the small supply of horses at the time of the site visit.
- The horses present were in good physical condition. At one slaughterhouse, we noticed that a number of horses showed signs of wounds from fighting or bites. This is likely to be a result of the competition and establishment of a hierarchy in the enclosures.
- All the horses have an individual ear tag.

### **Driving to the restraint box**

The staff members approached the horses in the waiting area quietly and calmly. From the waiting area, the horses were driven to the restraint box with the help of flags. Horses that did not react to the drivers and their flags were given a halter and were led to the restraint box individually. The way in which the staff put the halter on these horses attested to their professionalism and indicated that the horses were not wild, despite the fact that they had been bred/kept in large fields. The side walls of the driving corridors are enclosed so that the horses are not distracted by activities in the surrounding area during the driving process.

Although most of the horses enter the restraint box easily, some of them are rather reluctant. There are several reasons for this:

- Compressed air was escaping from the restraint box. The sound made the horses restless.
- Picking up and clicking the clutch hooks along the slaughter line into place made a noise that disturbed the horses.
- The material and colour of the floor in the restraint box are uneven.
- The floor in the restraint box has a metal diamond plate. When a horse enters, high-pitched sounds are produced.

The horse will enter the restraint box more easily if adjustments are made in response to the causes listed.

### **The stunning**

- The horses are stunned with a pneumatic bolt gun as soon as possible after they enter the restraint box.
- There is a back-up device (mechanically penetrating bolt gun) in the restraint box.
- Cameras have been installed at various places in a number of slaughterhouses in order to monitor the slaughtering process.
- Attention should be paid to the interval between shooting and administering a prick so that the horses bleed out. This is usually less than 60 seconds, but for some animals this was longer than 60 seconds. This must remain below 60 seconds to ensure proper bleeding.

### 3.2 The collection centre

- The visit to the horse collection centre in Entre Rios (Argentina) took place in the presence of an SGS auditor who was there to test an audit protocol that had been developed. During the period prior to transport to the slaughterhouse, the horses are kept in fields around the collection centre. In the last few hours before the scheduled transport, the horses are kept in a collection field behind the company buildings and close to the loading area. There is sufficient natural shelter, drinking water and grass for the horses in the collection field. The soil conditions and fencing of the enclosure are good. A few young trees are protected by fencing that should be made more animal-friendly. The horses are checked individually to make sure they are fit for transport. This assessment indicated that the 28 horses present were fit for transport. After the assessment of the horses in the collection field, they were driven to the loading area along a wide corridor with the help of driving aids (= long sticks with flags). The horses were driven calmly, without any direct contact between the horses and the driving aid and/or drivers. The horses were loaded into the compartmentalised trailer in small groups. The driving and loading procedure went as it should, that is in a calm, animal-friendly manner.

## 4 Conclusion

Over the years (2015 – 2022), the horse slaughterhouses in Argentina and Uruguay have been visited on several occasions. In addition, several horse collection centres have been visited. After each visit, advice on improvements in the field of animal welfare and behaviour was prepared and given to the companies concerned. At each subsequent visit, it was noted that the advice on improvements had been implemented. For example, in the past few years a new waiting area has been built (Lamar and Clay slaughterhouses), a new restraint box has been installed (Clay slaughterhouse), the driving corridor has been adapted (Infriiba slaughterhouse), the shower system for the horses has been adapted to cause less agitation for the horses (Sarel slaughterhouse), the corrals have been adapted (Solemar and LandL) and the effectiveness of the stunning process has been monitored in all slaughterhouses (among other things by installing cameras for continuous monitoring). Over the years, involvement has increased among all players, including the slaughterhouses, the collection centres, the inspection bodies and the educational and research institutions. During this period, the players involved have asked increasingly practical questions to gain knowledge with a view to optimising animal welfare and behaviour, which is also a sign of greater involvement.



## 5 Photographic material













