Omnibus Bill Passes, Nixes Horse Processing

Horse processing will not take place in the United States after Congress passed a bill in January that eliminates funding to carry out horsemeat inspections at domestic plants.

Prior to 2007 USDA personnel carried out horsemeat inspections at U.S. horse processing plants. In 2007, Congress voted to strip the USDA of funding required to pay personnel conducting such inspections. Since then horses have been exported for processing.

Federal funding bills continued to include language denying horsemeat inspection funding until 2011. Then Congress passed a bill that failed to contain language specifically forbidding the USDA from using federal dollars to fund horsemeat inspections. Shortly after that bill became law horse processing plants were proposed in several states, but none became operational.

On Jan. 13 leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees released the “Omnibus Bill of 2014.” Section 745 of the bill strips the USDA of funding for horsemeat inspections.

On Jan. 15 Congressman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) reported that the House of Representatives had passed the bill, and the next day Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) announced that the bill had cleared the Senate. On Jan. 17 President Barack Obama signed the bill into law.

In a written statement, Landrieu said, “I am relieved that horse slaughter is now banned in the United States, protecting the American public from the very serious health and safety risks posed by horsemeat.”

“ I am relieved that horse slaughter is now banned.”

SENATOR MARY LANDRIEU

Atty. Blair Dunn represents Valley Meats Co. LLC, in Roswell, N.M., which had sought to process horses. Although the bill’s passage prevents his clients from serving in this function, he said Valley Meats’ plant remains viable for other uses.

Meanwhile, Landrieu said Congress is considering the Safeguard American Food Exports Act, which would prohibit the export of horses to processing plants in Canada and Mexico.—Pat Raia

Senate Okays Veterinary Medicine Mobility Act

Veterinarians who make farm calls are one step closer to better protection from federal drug prosecution after the U.S. Senate passed a bill to amend the Controlled Substances Act.

The act is intended to prevent the unauthorized manufacture, sale, and transport of drugs likely to be abused. Under current law, veterinarians who carry drugs to farm calls or in mobile veterinary units could be found in violation of the act.

Introduced last year by Senators Angus King (I-Maine) and Jerry Moran (R-Ks.), S 1171, or the Veterinary Medicine Mobility Act, would amend the law to allow licensed veterinarians who operate mobile clinics, respond to emergency situations, or otherwise treat horses on farms and elsewhere to lawfully transport controlled substances to and dispense at treatment sites. Similar legislation, HR 1528, sponsored by Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.) and Ted Yoho, (R-Fla.) remains pending in the House of Representatives.

On Jan. 8 the U.S. Senate passed S 1171 by a unanimous vote.

King said the bill enhances veterinarians’ abilities to provide animals with care, especially in rural settings: “This bill will grant properly licensed veterinarians the right to carry and administer controlled substances, including important medications, allowing them to do their job.”

American Association of Equine Practitioners President Jeff Blea, DVM, said, “Most equine veterinarians provide care for their patients at the owner’s farm, not in a clinical setting. The passage of this bill in the Senate is extremely important to the animals we treat.”

S 1171 now moves on to the U.S. House of Representatives for consideration.—Pat Raia

New Horse Health Concerns

Veterinarians and horse owners should remain vigilant for two relatively new horse health challenges: equine rhinitis A (ERAV) and B (ERBV) viruses and coronavirus.

Previously, ERAV and ERBV were rarely implicated as causes of equine disease. Equine rhinitis A appears to cause mild to moderate respiratory disease, with or without nasal discharge, pharyngitis (inflammation of the pharynx), and coughing. Horses shed ERAV in urine, feces, and respiratory secretions, whereas veterinarians have not recognized urine and fecal shedding of ERBV. In 2012 a conditionally licensed ERAV vaccine became available in the United States. Equine rhinitis viruses also have some zoonotic potential, meaning they are communicable to people, but the risk of human infection appears low.

In 1983 and 1990 veterinarians reported isolating a corona-type virus from adult horses and a foal with combined immunodeficiency, respectively. And since 2000 there have been various reports of coronavirus isolation in foals (without any known immune deficiencies) with diarrhea and other reports of adult horses with fevers and bowel disease. In 2011 and 2012 veterinarians reported a number of coronavirus cases in adult horses in the United States. Most of the horses were off their feed, lethargic, and febrile, and some had soft to watery manure. Most horses improved within four days, but 7% of affected animals were euthanized.

To avoid disease infection, farms and stables should adequately isolate newly introduced horses and, of course, any horses with clinical signs including respiratory disease and/or diarrhea. Your veterinarian can help you make rational decisions regarding testing and quarantine measures.

—C.J. (Kate) Savage, BVSc(Hons), MS, PhD, Dipl. ACVIM, WEVA Junior Vice President

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