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National Black Farmers Association



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The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Energy and Commerce Committee
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

On behalf of the National Black Farmers Association, I am writing to express my **strong support for H.R. 3355, the Save America's Forgotten Equines Act (SAFE) Act**. I am President and founder of the National Black Farmers Association, which has more than 94,000 members in 46 states. The National Black Farmers Association is dedicated to serving America's Black and other small farmers through outreach and technical assistance. I am a fourth-generation farmer, and I own and operate a 210-acre farm in Mecklenburg County, Virginia where I raise soybeans, corn, wheat, and beef cattle. My total operation consists of farms in three counties.

An avid horseman, I currently keep two Saddlebreds and two mules, and have owned multiple Quarter Horses. My mules, fondly known as '40 Acres' and 'Struggle' are hard workers and in fact, they accompanied me to Washington, D.C. in 2003 when they pulled my wagon from my farm to the nation's capital to raise awareness about racial discrepancies in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's farm lending program. The journey was the subject of much press attention and my mules seemed to revel in the spotlight.

I first learned that American horses are being slaughtered for human consumption overseas when HBO's Real Sports aired a segment called "Hidden Horses" in 2008. Like many Americans, I was unaware that such an industry even existed and was horrified to learn that foreign-owned companies were preying on our horses for such an un-American purpose. To me as a horse-owning farmer, and to the members of the National Black Farmers Association, horses are part of the farm and part of the family. They are to be respected and treated with dignity and for that, they provide us with hard labor and companionship. They are not raised for slaughter,

and it is unconscionable that any horseman or woman would choose to end his or her horse's life in such a brutal manner.

I was so shocked to learn of this secretive trade that I immediately contacted Chris Heyde in Washington, D.C. to offer my support for the campaign to end horse slaughter. Not only did the National Black Farmers Association endorse Congressional efforts to end horse slaughter including H.R. 3355, the Save America's Forgotten Equines Act (SAFE) Act, but I offered to help place horses at risk of slaughter on my and my members' farms.

Since 2008, I have become deeply immersed in the subject and have spent significant time on Capitol Hill testifying in support of an earlier version of this bill before the Judiciary Committee which approved the legislation, meeting with legislators and their staff to express the National Black Farmers Association's support for the SAFE Act. The experience has been an interesting one during which I have heard all sorts of excuses about why we need horse slaughter in this country. As someone whose life is all about agriculture, a working farmer, I believe I am particularly well qualified to address these points and to demonstrate exactly why we can and must end the practice of horse slaughter for good.

Before that, however, I think it is worth noting that prior to my involvement with this effort I was not only unaware of the practice of horse slaughter, but I was unaware – and remain so to this day – of any flood of 'unwanted' horses roaming the countryside, as some of our opponents have claimed with no evidence while the number of horses being sent to slaughter has continued to decline. The notion that horses are being turned out, abandoned, neglected, and abused in increasing number as a direct result of the campaign to end horse slaughter simply hasn't been borne out where I come from, and I say this as a working farmer with horses.

This speaks to the first argument raised by those who oppose an end to horse slaughter; the idea that we need slaughter to dispose of unwanted horses, ironically a term and concept only coined after the original bill was introduced by those advocating for slaughter. The truth is that most horses going to slaughter are being purposely bought by middlemen, known as killer-buyers, working for the slaughterhouses rather than being sold to slaughter by their owners. In short, the slaughter market exists not to provide an outlet for unwanted horses but so that the foreign-owned slaughterhouses can profit from the trade.

However, should anyone have concerns about surplus of horses that might conceivably exist should this bill pass into law, the National Black Farmers Association stands ready, along with other equine organizations, to assist in finding homes to such horses. We look forward with solutions and not backwards with excuses.

I have also been told that passage of the SAFE Act will disproportionately affect economically disadvantaged horse owners and that we must leave slaughter on the table as an option for those who need to dispose of a horse and whose pocketbooks are tight. The truth is that it costs a couple of hundred of dollars to have a veterinarian put a horse down, and that a person

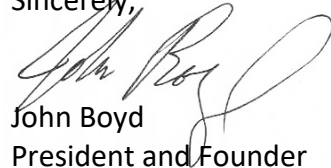
can make a couple of hundred of dollars by selling a horse to slaughter, but money isn't everything. The fact is that my organization is largely made up of lower-income, economically disadvantaged farmers and we are saying that we neither want nor need horse slaughter as an option in this country. We are willing to provide quality care for our horses and when the time comes to end our horses' lives, we opt to do so by truly humane means – not by shipping them to slaughter for a quick buck.

Another point I've heard time and time again from those opposed to a ban on horse slaughter is that horse slaughter is a form of humane euthanasia. This notion is as preposterous as it is false. There is a huge difference between having a veterinarian put my horse down on my farm when the time comes and putting my horse onto a trailer packed with dozens of other horses to travel for more than a day and night without any food or water or rest, only to be brutally handled and slaughtered in the most fearful and terrifying environment. A five-year-old could see the difference between these two scenarios and it is stunning and disingenuous to me that anyone would attempt to equate the two practices. Bottom line, horse slaughter isn't humane, it's downright cruel.

Some have said that banning horse slaughter will be the start of a slippery slope – that the animal rights people will seek to ban cattle or pig slaughter next. This is a sad, yet far too typical political spin on a serious issue of animal welfare and as a farmer – a cattle farmer at that – I find this notion ridiculous. If I had any fear that banning horse slaughter would hinder my ability to raise cattle, sheep, pigs, or chickens for food I wouldn't support this legislation, but the fact is that there is no connection, no chance that ending horse slaughter will result in such a hampering of American agriculture. Americans don't raise horses for slaughter, and we don't eat them. Horses are a revered animal in American history and culture. They may technically be livestock, but they are much, much more and that is why Americans strongly support an end to their slaughter for human consumption overseas.

I commend you Chairman Pallone, a long-standing supporter of bipartisan legislation banning horse slaughter, as well as the sponsor and lead cosponsor Representative Schakowsky and Representative Buchanan and all the bipartisan supporters of this important legislation for bringing this issue to light and for offering a way to end this abject cruelty. I thank you for receiving my letter in support of H.R. 3355, the Save America's Forgotten Equines Act (SAFE) Act and urge the committee to speedily approve the legislation so that it may move through the United States Congress and pass into law.

Sincerely,



John Boyd
President and Founder

cc: Members, Energy and Commerce Committee