

Why Belgians Like Horses in Texas for Dining

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owns one of the Texas slaughterhouses under attack.

Federal law doesn't ban eating horse in the U.S., but the meat is now no longer sold for human consumption domestically. It was marketed during the meat shortages of World War II. A lack of demand later dried up the domestic market, though horse meat remained on the menu of the Harvard Faculty Club in Cambridge, Mass., until 1983. The chef took it off when he could no longer get fresh meat; the steaks were arriving frozen.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which inspects the horses headed for foreign tables, says 58,736 horses were slaughtered in the U.S. last year for human consumption, yielding 13.6 million pounds of meat for export to the European Union, Japan, Mexico and Switzerland. A decade ago, there were around a dozen U.S. facilities slaughtering horses for export. Today, with demand declining, that's down to just two in Texas and one in Illinois.

Mr. Kemseke, 33 years old, is the third generation of his family to be in the horse-meat business. He owns slaughterhouses in New Zealand and Romania but likes the American quarter horse best. Ample grazing land means more American horses eat natural grasses, enhancing their flavor, he says.

In the 1990s, Mr. Kemseke lived in Kaufman, Texas, where he managed the family's U.S. slaughterhouse. He loved the ranching town, pop. 6,700, near Dallas. "I had a little cowboy thing going," he says, slapping his pants and shirt. "Wrangler jeans, the belt, the boots, the Western shirt." He cruised around town in a 1971 brown Cadillac. "Everybody waved and called my name. I was living the American life."

Foes of horse slaughter portray the meat as an exotic delicacy for foreigners, evoking images of Paris *brasseries* serving up American horse meat alongside foie gras and champagne. But many consum-

ers of horse meat are more like Nicole Chaupin, a French homemaker in a skirt and sneakers who ordered a small container of Mr. Dhalluin's freshly made horse tartare. "It's good. It's healthy," Mrs. Chaupin said of horse meat, which is slightly redder than beef, more tender and gamier in flavor.

Historically, consumption of horse meat in Europe was associated with poverty and desperation. The practice is believed to have begun when Napoleon's troops, fighting the Russians at the Battle of Eylau in Poland in 1807, ran low on supplies and ate their horses. Horse meat helped sustain Europeans during the deprivations of two World Wars.

Because horse meat is high in iron and low in fat, European doctors today often prescribe it to treat anemia.

The American Quarter Horse Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association and other groups support slaughter, arguing that there are not enough rescue facilities to care for unwanted horses. And in Washington, many farm-state lawmakers also want to keep the slaughterhouses open, in part because closing them might embolden animal-rights groups and vegetarians to demand a ban on the slaughter of beef cattle, pigs and sheep. "What is the distinction between a steer, a hog and a horse?" Iowa Rep. Steve King asked on the House floor in June. The zebra he ate in Africa last year was excellent, the Iowa Republican said.

Horses "are not like other animals," says John Hettinger, a thoroughbred breeder and auction-house owner in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. "I've seen a Clydesdale without a halter on performing intricate maneuvers in Madison Square Garden," he says. "Now, I'd like a cattleman to show me a cow that can do the same thing."

Mr. Hettinger, 72, has spent \$160,000 on Washington lobbyists in an effort to ban the slaughter of horses, federal

records show. The thoroughbred auction house he controls, Fasig-Tipton Inc., once sold Man o' War, whose racing career from 1919 to 1920 is considered one of the greatest in American history. "I've made my living off horses," says Mr. Hettinger, "and this is my way of giving back." The Texas plants have spent about the same amount in an effort to preserve it, according to Mr. Kemseke. The Texas slaughterhouses' lobbyist, Jim Bradshaw,



Olivier Kemseke

has made more than \$27,000 in campaign donations to pro-slaughter lawmakers, federal records show. While the debate goes on, an American Airlines flight takes off every day from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, headed for Paris's Charles DeGaulle airport with a load of horse carcasses in its cargo belly. After passing French inspection, the U.S. horse meat from Mr. Kemseke's plant is driven in refrigerated trucks to rural Rekkem, Belgium, where it is repackaged and shipped to butchers. Some especially choosy butchers, like Mr. Dhalluin, come to the plant's freezers to pick their own cuts.

Mr. Kemseke uses local horses, too. In a run-down neighborhood in central Brussels called Anderlecht, famous for its abattoirs, Mr. Kemseke watched recently as 200 frightened Belgian horses were unloaded from trailers, kicking and snorting, and tied to iron rails. Wearing a butcher's robe, he walked among the animals, lifting tails and slapping flanks, making notes on a pad about which to purchase for slaughter.

Horses are slaughtered in the same manner as cattle: with a metal bolt shot

into their heads. The antislughter activists call this method particularly inhumane. "If our friends in Belgium want to eat horse meat, I'm not trying to dictate that they do or not to do it," says Skip Trimble of the Texas Humane Legislation Network. "But we in America, who view the horse differently, should not supply them with our horses."

So far, economic arguments have prevailed over the emotional appeals of the antislughter forces. Mr. Bradshaw, the slaughterhouse lobbyist, tells lawmakers the Texas plants spend \$6 million a year shipping horse meat with American Airlines and other U.S. carriers.

Even the oversized American flag at the American Legion post that greets drivers entering Kaufman is paid for by Mr. Kemseke's horse-slaughter business. "So they want to close us down?" Mr. Kemseke says. "Then I don't know where Kaufman's gonna get their next flag."

Why Belgians Shoot Horses in Texas For Dining in Europe

Grass-Fed Meat Is Superior, But Slaughterhouses Draw Growing Criticism in U.S.

By MARY JACOBY

TOURCOING, France—Christian Dhalluin, a butcher in this rural French hamlet near the Belgian border, dropped some ground meat into a bowl and mixed it with a spicy mayonnaise sauce to make his specialty: American horse meat tartare.

"I love America," said Mr. Dhalluin. "The horse meat from the U.S. is the best in the world."

Some Americans would be distressed to hear that. A vocal antislughter movement argues that horses have a special place in American culture and history and should not be killed for food. Activists have spurred an energetic but uphill effort in Congress to shut down the last three horse slaughterhouses in the U.S. All are Belgian-owned and supply butchers around the world.

A U.S. ban would mean that Mr. Dhalluin would no longer be able to buy the meat that vaulted him to a gold medal in a recent culinary contest for "best sausage in the category of garlic."

"Americans do not profit from slaughtering horses," Rep. John Sweeney, a New York Republican trying to close down the slaughterhouses, said in House debate in June. "Foreigners eat our horses, and foreign companies make money off the sale of meat."

The revelation three years ago that the 1986 Kentucky Derby winner, Ferdinand, ended up in a slaughterhouse in Japan, galvanized the U.S. antislughter movement—and caused two of the Belgian-owned plants to take on lawyers and lobbyists. "Toss in Mr. Ed and Black Beauty, and we have a real public-relations problem," says Olivier Kemseke, a Belgian horse-meat dealer whose family



Christian Dhalluin

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