

Last Remaining Horse Slaughter Plant Closes

Cavel International loses its court battles.

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A federal appellate court has upheld an Illinois law prohibiting the killing of horses for human consumption. The ruling, which was passed down on Sept. 21 by the U.S. 7th Court of Appeals, forces the last remaining horse slaughter plant in the United States, Cavel International, to close its doors.

Cavel, a Belgium-owned company based in DeKalb, Ill., had asked the court to overturn the Illinois law that passed in May 2007. Cavel filed a suit challenging whether the law violated international commerce rules. Texas, Arizona, California, Ohio and Oklahoma have bans on slaughtering horses or selling their meat.

"Even if no horses live longer as a result of the new law, a state is permitted, within reason, to express disgust at what people do with the dead, whether dead human beings or dead animals," Judge Richard Posner wrote for the court. Cavel killed as many as 60,000 horses a year, according to the court's ruling. At one time, about 1,000 horses a week were killed and processed at DeKalb plant. The horsemeat butchered at Cavel was exported to other countries. Belgium imports the most U.S. horse meat, with more than 5.5 million pounds, or 2.5 million kilograms, bought last year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. France was second with 3.62 million pounds, followed by Russia at 2.72 million pounds.

Cavel has operated for 20 years, generated \$20 million in annual revenue and employed about 60 people, according to court documents.

Earlier this year, two other U.S. horse slaughterhouses, both in Texas, were closed after a Texas law banning slaughter was upheld in federal court.

While horse welfare groups are hailing the Cavel shutdown, many stress the importance of passing The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (H.R. 503/S. 311), a federal bill to ban horse slaughter in the United States and the transport of horses abroad for the same purpose. The bill is still pending in the U.S. Congress.

"[The bill's] enactment is now essential to ensure horses that would have been sent to Cavel are not exported for slaughter in Canada or Mexico," reports the Animal Welfare Institute, an international nonprofit organization that has been leading the national campaign to end horse slaughter in this country.