

Horse collection centres + slaughterhouses

Report on site visits in Argentina and Uruguay

October 2023

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1 Preface

During a 14-day tour of Argentina and Uruguay, five horse slaughterhouses (Clay, Sarel, LandL, Lamar and Infriiba) were visited. Six collection centres and one farm (which all supply the slaughterhouses mentioned) were visited to assess accommodation, horse transport trucks where present and any horses present from the perspective of animal welfare. A demonstration of electronic horse identification was attended. The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Montevideo was also visited for a tour and a consultation to assess the animal welfare component of the veterinary medicine course and of the veterinary inspections that take place in practice.

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 slaughterhouse employees for their hospitality and openness and for the freedom to come and go as required during these annual visits.

2 Programme

The tour commenced in Uruguay with a visit to the Clay and Sarel slaughterhouses, and two collection centres. On Friday, 20 October 2023, the Uruguayan Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was visited and a consultation took place on animal welfare legislation and follow-up in Uruguay. We then crossed the Río de la Plata to visit the horse slaughterhouses in Argentina. This was followed by visits to the LandL Lamar and Infriba slaughterhouses. There were also visits to four collection centres and a farm in Argentina (which all supply the slaughterhouses mentioned). A horse chipping demonstration was attended.

Tuesday, 17 October 2023

Visit to a collection centre belonging to a supplier to Clay (Uruguay)

Monitoring the unloading of horses at the Clay slaughterhouse unloading bay (Uruguay)

Wednesday, 18 October 2023

Visit to/audit of Clay slaughterhouse (Uruguay)

Thursday, 19 October 2023

Visit/audit of Sarel slaughterhouse (Uruguay)

Friday, 20 October 2023

Visit and consultation at the University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Montevideo (Uruguay)

Visit to a collection centre belonging to a supplier to Sarel (Uruguay)

Monday, 23 October 2023

Visit to/audit of the LandL slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Visit to a farm belonging to a supplier to LandL (Argentina)

Tuesday, 24 October 2023

Visit to three collection centres supplying Lamar (Argentina)

Monitoring the unloading of horses at the Lamar slaughterhouse unloading bay (Argentina)

A horse chipping demonstration was attended (Argentina)

Wednesday, 25 October 2023

Visit to/audit of Lamar slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Thursday, 26 October 2023

Visit to/audit of Infriba slaughterhouse (Argentina)

Visit to a collection centre belonging to a supplier to Infriba (Argentina)

3 Summary

3.1 The slaughterhouses

All the horse slaughterhouses visited were in operation at the time of the visit. It was therefore possible to focus the visit not only on the infrastructure but also on the animals, the staff (and their interactions with the horses) and the environment (including weather conditions). The following elements were observed at each slaughterhouse: the enclosures, the waiting area, the (process of driving to the) restraint box and the stunning process. In addition, any changes in infrastructure and practices since previous visits were studied and assessed.

The unloading bay

There is a raised unloading bay (at the same level as the trailer floor) at each location. One slaughterhouse has a covered unloading bay. This has the advantage that weather influences (such as direct sunlight combined with lines of shadow) do not hamper the unloading process. At most of the unloading bays, multiple horses were able to walk side by side at the same time. In one slaughterhouse, the horses were unloaded in single file.

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.
- The soil conditions were good in all the corrals.
- 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.
- 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. In one slaughterhouse, more attention should be paid to the continuous provision of drinking water.

- 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.
- All the horses had 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 using sticks with multiple strips of fabric or flags. Flags have more impact than strips of fabric because they have a larger area and are therefore more easily noticed. Horses that did not react to the drivers and their flags were given a halter and were led to the restraint box individually.
- 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 entered the restraint box easily, some of them were rather reluctant. There are a variety of causes for this.
- Due to required sanitary obligations, the horses are doused manually or using an automatic system before stunning so that any dust in the coat is washed away. Any form of dousing is stressful for the horses due to the noise and water jet and from an animal welfare perspective it would be better to omit it.
- The lighting in the driving corridor as well as the unloading bay and waiting area, is important. Lighting with a flicker frequency that disturbs the horses is observed in some slaughterhouses. This lighting should be adjusted.

Stunning

- The horses were stunned with a captive-bolt gun - which is pneumatic in some cases - as soon as possible after they enter the restraint box.
- In each of the slaughterhouses inspected, a "backup" device (mechanical penetrating captive-bolt gun) was present at the level of 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 making an incision so that the horses bleed out. This is usually less than 60 seconds, but for some animals it was longer than 60 seconds. It must always be less than 60 seconds to optimise bleeding out.

3.2 Collection centres

Six collection centres were visited. More and more attention is being paid to the infrastructure at collection centres due to the audits conducted by the SGS. Infrastructure work at collection centres had been completed recently or was still ongoing. Consideration is given to the area, soil conditions, the presence of natural or artificial shelter, fencing (i.e. no barbed wire), drinking water and the opportunity to graze.

3.3 Loading and unloading

The loading of horses into trailers was viewed at five of the collection centres. Parameters recorded including horses sliding, falling and being turned around. In all cases the horses were loaded in small groups (depending on the size of the compartment in the trailer). The unloading bay has an earthen floor or a wooden floor with cross slats. The sloping floor provided sufficient grip for the horses. It should be noted, however, that these observations were made under dry weather conditions. No non-conformities were observed during loading. However, it was noted that when loading (and later when unloading), a lot of noise is produced by the horses in the trailers as a result of the metal floor and the non-slip grilles on the trailer floor.

Unloading of horses at the slaughterhouse was monitored at four of the slaughterhouses. As the trailer was reversing into the unloading bay, the horses were standing with their hindquarters against the rear door through which they were then unloaded. This means that in order to be unloaded the horses had to turn right around to face the doorway and walk towards the unloading dock. Horses should be allowed sufficient time to turn around and explore the unloading bay. As soon as the first horse went through the door, the other horses followed. There is a raised unloading bay (at the same level as the trailer floor) at each location.

3.4 Electronic identification

Horses transported to slaughterhouses are implanted with a chip. Administration of the chip occurred smoothly in a demonstration attended. The necessary data (horse, owner, location etc.) is transmitted to a central database via an app.

4 Conclusion

Horse slaughterhouses in Argentina and Uruguay have been visited on several occasions over several years (2015 – 2023). 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. Both minor and major infrastructure changes have been made over the years. In addition to the infrastructure, companies should constantly monitor the treatment of horses by employees. This can be done through direct observation and/or using camera monitoring. The protocol for monitoring needs to be further standardised, including the times when monitoring takes place, the parameters monitored and any associated actions.

In addition to slaughterhouses, more and more attention is also being paid to horse collection centres. In all the collection centres visited, works had recently been carried out or were still taking place. These infrastructure works included construction of shelters, planting of trees, fencing, supply of drinking water, adjustments to the loading bay, etc.

Demonstrations of loading (at the collection centres) and unloading (at the slaughterhouses) were monitored. During loading, the horses were loaded in small groups. The horses entered the trailers quietly and easily. To unload, the trailers reversed to the slaughterhouse unloading bay. At this time the horses were standing with their hindquarters against the back door, through which they would be unloaded. This means they had to turn through 180° to face the doorway and walk through it. The horses must be given sufficient time for this.

Horses transported to slaughterhouses are implanted with a chip. Administration of the chip occurred smoothly in a demonstration attended. The necessary data (horse, owner, location etc.) are transmitted via an app.

5 Photographic material







