



January 28, 2019

The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Conaway  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman  
House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Chairmen Graham, Peterson, and Pallone and Ranking Members Feinstein, Conaway, and Walden:

The Public Lands Council (PLC), National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), and American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) strongly oppose S. 2006 and H.R. 961, the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act. PLC is the only national organization dedicated solely to representing the roughly 22,000 ranchers who hold federal grazing permits and operate on federal lands. NCBA is the beef industry's largest and oldest national marketing and trade association, representing American cattlemen and women who provide much of the nation's supply of food and own or manage a large portion of America's private property. ASI is a federation of forty-five state sheep associations representing a diverse industry since 1865 and has been the national trade organization representing the interests of the 100,000 sheep ranchers located throughout the country who produce America's lamb and wool. AFBF is the nation's largest general farm organization, representing the interests of agricultural producers in every state and Puerto Rico, including those involved in both crop and livestock production. AQHA is the largest Equine Breed Registry in the world with a primary mission to record and preserve the pedigree of the American Quarter Horse while maintaining the integrity of the breed and welfare of its horses.

Horse processing facilities have been closed in the United States since 2007 after funding for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection of these plants and the inspection of horses in transit for slaughter was halted in the Fiscal Year 2006 appropriations bill. While proponents of the ban on horse slaughter see bypassing the legislative authorization process as a necessary means to an end, the negative impact this has had on horse welfare is abundantly clear. Horse owners must have a means for humanely dealing with equines at the end of their lives. Costly veterinarian euthanasia services and remains disposal are affordable to only a fraction of the population.

In 2011, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) submitted a report to Congress which concluded that horse welfare in the U.S. had generally declined since 2007, as evidenced by the notable increase in horse abandonments and investigations for abuse and neglect. However, the number of U.S. horses purchased for slaughter has not decreased. Rather, horses are now transported significantly longer distances for slaughter in Mexico and Canada. The number of horses exported to Mexico for slaughter has increased by 273 percent since 2006, and the funding prohibition on the inspection of horses prior to slaughter has impeded USDA's ability to properly ensure horse welfare.

In addition to potentially harming domesticated horses in private care, these bills are a back-door means to codify the ban on processing wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 allows for the slaughter of equids as a population management strategy:

*The Secretary shall cause additional excess wild free-roaming horses and burros for which an adoption demand by qualified individuals does not exist to be destroyed in the most humane and cost efficient manner possible [16 U.S.C. § 1333(b)(2)(C)].*

The Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act further allows for the sale of excess wild equids for the ultimate purpose of destruction into commercial products:

*An excess animal that meets either of the criteria in paragraph (1) shall be made available for sale without limitation...[16 U.S.C. § 1331(e)(2) et seq.].*

Unfortunately, in addition to the appropriations funding prohibition on USDA inspections, the Consolidated Appropriations Acts of the past several fiscal years have prohibited both the humane processing of excess horses and burros and their sale for processing into commercial products. These policy riders have placed a significant burden on BLM and USFS managers as they struggle to curb the overpopulation of wild horses and burros and maintain the Appropriate Management Level (AML).

While NCBA, PLC, and AFBF have recently reached an agreement with animal advocacy organizations to reverse population growth trends and make progress toward AML by nonlethal means, the undersigned organizations do not support a wholesale ban on horse processing as a population control tool. We remain confident that our proposal, if adequately funded by Congress and properly implemented by the BLM, will be successful in its mission, but it is short-sighted to eliminate lethal options in perpetuity.

The U.S. livestock industry depends upon an economically viable and healthy horse industry, as well as a system that offers responsible management options and a humane end of life for unwanted horses. The SAFE Act will result in an animal welfare crisis and a massive contraction of the U.S. Equine industry with a current annual economic impact to the U.S. Economy of \$122 billion.

Decisions about animal welfare should be based on solid scientific facts and sound animal husbandry, not merely on emotion. The humane processing of horses is upheld by the American Association of Equine Practitioners and the American Veterinary Medical Association. Without this option, unwanted horses will be subject to a continued life of discomfort, pain and possibly inadequate care or abandonment. Both the House and Senate versions of the SAFE Act are incompatible with the professional opinions of these animal welfare experts and the undersigned organizations that represent those who advocate sound animal husbandry. We urge your opposition to S. 2006 and H.R. 961.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation  
American Quarter Horse Association  
American Sheep Industry Association  
National Cattlemen's Beef Association  
Public Lands Council