

Photo Illustration by Tyswan Stewart / Times Union

## EDITORIAL

# Horses deserve better

**L**et's acknowledge from the start that our relationship with animals is riddled with hypocrisy and inconsistency.

On a purely objective level, with culture and emotion out of the equation, it makes little sense that we treat dogs and cats as family while subjecting pigs, which have similar levels of emotional intelligence, to the legal tortures of factory farming.

It is likewise inconsistent that Americans expect horses to be treated better than other forms of livestock, or see thoroughbreds as more worthy of protection than, say, draft horses.

But the plain truth is that we do, inconsistent or not, and so it was disturbing to read Times Union reporter Rebekah F. Ward's account of thoroughbreds and standardbreds from New York's racing industry being discarded like yesterday's news and slaughtered for meat consumption.

In part, it's the dichotomy that's jarring. One day, a race horse is being watched and admired by thousands, the graceful and dignified star of a widely lucrative industry. Then, when the animal's performance slips alongside its profitability, it is shipped to an out-of-state "kill pen."

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**THE ISSUE:**

Racehorses from New York are still being slaughtered for meat consumption.

**THE STAKES:**

The stars of a lucrative industry deserve better treatment after their years of service.

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"They go from getting 20 pounds of grain a day, given a bath every single day, (with) manicured feet, to being thrown into a pen with 100 other horses," where, says the operator of a non-profit horse rescue operation, "the thoroughbreds normally get the crap beat out of them."

To their credit, state lawmakers have tried to address the issue. A new law bans the slaughter of racehorses and breeding stock for human and animal consumption. But it faces a big hurdle: Racehorses are typically auctioned or shipped out of state before they are trucked to slaughterhouses in Canada or Mexico. There are no legal slaughterhouses processing horses for human consumption in the United States, but Congress has yet to pass a federal law banning export for slaughter.

So, there's a role here for the industry and the New York Racing Association in

fixing the problem, in the form of significantly more money dedicated to race horse aftercare.

According to NYRA, the three largest thoroughbred bodies in the state and individual owners give about \$1.5 million annually to the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance. Contrast that with the \$800 million annual handle just at Saratoga Race Course, or the \$2.9 billion in state dollars and government-directed benefits received by the industry since 2008, and it's clear vastly more could go toward ensuring retired racehorses not only avoid the slaughterhouse but enjoy a decent quality of life.

Here's one idea: A small surcharge on every horse-racing bet placed in New York, with the money dedicated to an aftercare fund. Who among the crowds at Saratoga would object?

If there are objections, we would note another inconsistency in our treatment of animals: While dog racing is effectively illegal in New York (and most other states), horse racing is generously subsidized by taxpayers.

If the industry and NYRA want that inconsistency to continue, the least they can do is guarantee that racehorses enjoy retirements befitting their grace, beauty and dignity.