

Unwanted Horses Can Still Be Good Pets

Western Producer

this document web posted: 2007-11-08

By Karen Morrison

Saskatoon newsroom

Irish cannot turn her neck in one direction, Jezabell bears a scar across her forehead and an arthritic Arla needs a blanket to keep her warm.

These horses were all headed for meat markets before Bunnie and Lawrence Harasym bought them and nine others and brought them to their Paradise Stable Horse Rescue Ranch outside Saskatoon.

The Harasym's are regulars at local auctions where they try to outbid horse meat buyers for ponies, Quarter horses and draft horses, which often sell for as little as \$70.

Their goal is to one day expand their five-year-old rescue operation to rehabilitate more horses, add a riding arena for year round training and riding and host auctions for would-be buyers looking for pet horses.

In addition to horses, Lawrence and Bunnie share their 80-acre ranch with a host of cats and dogs, many of whom were also rescued from difficult circumstances.

While acquiring donkeys, goats, ducks and other small animals for their petting zoo at auction sales, the Harasym's began noticing the poor condition of many of the horses for sale.

"The reason they're in the shape they're in is neglect," said Bunnie, who added they end up at the auction when they have outlived their usefulness.

"They look at them as disposable," she said.

Lawrence recalled a Percheron they bought with a growth on its back foot and a heavy horse that could hardly stand up that has since gained 400 pounds.

"There always seemed to be a horse that pulled on our heartstrings," he said.

The Western College of Veterinary Medicine has provided the couple with necessary surgeries and medical help while neighbours and volunteers have contributed used horse tack and offered barn space when required.

The Harasym's believe many horses at auction are viable and can be treated, trained and sold to good homes.

They are concerned the opening of a multi-species slaughter plant at Neudorf, Sask., means more unwanted horses will end up there for slaughter.

A shutdown of the horse meat slaughter industry in the United States could also send more horses north, said Sinikka Crosland, executive director of the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition.

It has been involved in horse rescues since 1997.

Crosland expects most American horses will go to Mexico but Canada is another option with its six federally inspected plants.

She said most people think only the old and sick are shipped, but animals come from a variety of industries, including pregnant mare's urine, race tracks and farms. Most are not raised for meat but are culled from herds or barns.

"Many are young and healthy and could easily be trained," she said.

Her group is concerned that horses sold to meat markets are not killed, transported or handled humanely, and point out that they are intelligent prey animals and easily spooked.

"It's not a pretty picture and we want people to know what horses face," Crosland said.

Many owners sell their horses not realizing they end up in a slaughterhouse. Crosland said there needs to be greater accountability for these unwanted horses within the equine industry.

The Harasyns suggest setting up a horse's life insurance policy where owners put aside \$20 monthly over several years to pay for euthanasia and rendering when it becomes necessary.

They believe owning a horse is a long-term commitment and that the horse's life and value on a farm should be respected.

Bunnie related the tale of Irish, a registered Quarter horse that produced a foal annually for her previous owners before ending up at the auction as "hide and bones."

"I think they owed that horse something, given the money she made them," she said.