

Committee, is a fighter who helped give her state the best legal protections in the country, with more reforms coming. Liakos minces no words about the size of the problem. "This has completely decimated the horse population," she said, "particularly the older, mel-lower horses that prop up the riding sport. Riding is definitely down, and the dealers who sell equestrian items all report reduced sales."

Liakos says there's a whole other aspect of the business in the export of live horses to Japan and other Pacific Rim countries, where horse meat is considered a gourmet fad food. Some horses fly Federal Express, she said. This growing demand creates bizarre twists in the trade, like Florida thieves with trailers rounding up horses running loose after Hurricane Andrew. (Florida has also enacted laws preventing the export of horses without documentation.)

Bucolic Surroundings

Amfran Packing is in a rural setting near Connecticut's state-run greyhound racing track, which buys a small amount of the plant's product for its dogs. It looks like a farm. There are horses grazing in a field along the road and many more crowded into a corral next to a group of low concrete buildings. Except for the Grateful Dead, it's pretty quiet.

Some cows and pigs resist being led to slaughter, perhaps sensing the fear of those who have gone before. The horses, used to being herded around, are more docile. They are led down a chute into the processing room, where, while standing in a stall, a "captive bolt" slams into their heads to a depth of four inches. This is considered one of the more humane methods of slaughter, because death is instant and certain. (But, critics say, captive bolt systems frequently fail because of poor maintenance.) Minutes later, the gutted horses are swinging from meat hooks. In four days, after a quick trip to Logan or Kennedy, the meat will be on display in a French butcher shop (see second sidebar).

Amfran stands for "America" and "France" and the company has been owned by a Frenchman, Francis Raineau since 1973. The company, previously known as Plainfield Packing, had been a cow slaughterhouse until 1972, when high beef prices led consumers to look for alternatives. Plainfield Packing's owners started slaughtering horses in the apparently misguided belief that Americans would develop a taste for their flesh. Within a year and a half, they were ready to sell out.

Raineau is a trim, good-looking man in his 40s; though he sometimes disguises his European origins in cowboy boots and hat, he could be a French film star. He is, instead, a good judge of horse

flesh and what to do with it. "When I came here from Paris 16 years ago, there were only four horsemeat plants in the U.S.," Raineau said. "Nobody was taking advantage of the export market."

What the Americans couldn't make work, Raineau did. In addition to knowing the European markets, he speaks English, French, Italian, and Spanish, so was well-equipped to deal internationally. He trades with the Italians, the French, the Belgians (the highest per capita intake of horsemeat), the Dutch, the South Americans and the Japanese.

Horses in Effigy

In Raineau's Amfran office there are paintings of horses on black velvet, a horse coat rack in the bathroom and a copy of the program "Carcass Tracker" near the computer. Raineau's house, a 200-year-old colonial with exposed beams and a huge stone fireplace, is just up the road and not nearly so horsey. Only the occasional neigh from the corral disturbs the silence.

"Horsemeat started as a cheap food in Europe," says Raineau, as he hangs up from an international call. "After World War II, there were no beef cows around, but there were horses being used to plow the fields. The farmers were happy to get rid of their old and lame horses and the people were happy to eat them. Later, people continued to eat horse meat because beef was expensive. It was originally a working-class food, but now the price is the same as beef."

The Amfran stock, says Raineau, is bought at horse auctions all over the country. While Connecticut has the largest horse density per square mile in the entire country (48,000 animals in

1985), it does not have any race tracks and is not a major Amfran supplier. "We buy horses that cannot serve the purpose for which they were raised," he said. "Ninety percent were riding and race horses. They are not necessarily old; many are two, three, or four years old. Maybe the horse is a thoroughbred mare that isn't suitable for reproduction; you could buy it and keep it in your backyard for the rest of its life, but that's difficult and expensive."

Raineau buys horses for as little as \$200 and \$300 each, and frequently travels to auctions in Virginia, South Carolina, and Massachusetts, where he often competes with buyers from other slaughterhouses, some of them in eastern Canada (the Canadians, too, are in the export business). In this way, 10,000 horses a year make a one-way trip to Amfran. (Not all these horses are bought at auction: Raineau said some people bring their former pets personally, and one such couple, towing an empty two-horse trailer, was on the way out when we arrived).

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