

# **Dying by Inches - Shocking Rise in Large Scale Equine Starvation Cases Highlights Urgent Need for Social Change and Legal Action**

by  
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What do Virginia, Oregon, Nebraska, Tennessee, Ohio, Texas, Florida, New York, South Dakota, Louisiana, Oklahoma and British Columbia all have in common? Large numbers of starving horses were recently rescued from negligent owners in each of these areas.

Because of its constant access to international equestrian developments, and thanks to a network of allied equestrian editors and journalists, the Long Riders' Guild Academic Foundation (LRG-AF) has been monitoring the alarming rise of large-scale equine neglect in the United States and Canada. Thanks to the excellent on-line resources offered by the New Zealand based equestrian news service, Horse Talk, a survey of headlines revealed that the LRG's misgivings about the rise of equine neglect were not only confirmed, they were in fact far worse than we suspected.

This is not to say that other countries are not also facing similar challenges. For example in May, 2008 what was described as a "horror farm" was discovered in England. Astonished authorities seized 111 horses and ponies, then successfully brought charges in court against the owners.

Horror horse farm owners face trial May 16, 2008 111 horses and ponies [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2008/05/091.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2008/05/091.shtml)

Likewise, the United States saw cases of a similar nature. The first example noticed by the LRG occurred in June, 2007 when Horse Talk reported a large-scale case of North American equine starvation.

Police raid: Up to 80 horses seized in welfare swoop - Animal welfare authorities have swooped on a Texas property, removing up to 80 horses they say appear underfed and neglected. The 80 animals were living on a property, near Greenville, which is understood to be only 40 acres in size [www.horsetalk.co.nz/archives/2007/06/177.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/archives/2007/06/177.shtml)

The next year, the number of reported North American cases doubled. In May, 2008, Horse Talk reported that 120 horses had been seized from a Florida farm. Starving equines seized from Central Florida ranch - one example references the case of Francine Derby who had 120 starving equines seized from her Central Florida ranch in May [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2008/09/001.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2008/09/001.shtml)

A few months later, September, 2008, a second story informed the public that 82 horses had been seized in a New York State rescue. 82 horses seized in New York State rescue - A New York State animal welfare agency says it faces major bills in the wake of the biggest horse rescue in its history. Finger Lakes SPCA, in New York State, took a key role in a two-day rescue effort in Troupsburg, where 82 horses were seized [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2008/09/027.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2008/09/027.shtml)

Yet these incidents now appear to have been a preamble for the bad news yet to come. In 2009 Horse Talk recorded 16 cases of large scale equine starvation. These news stories detailed how 783 equines had been starved, and/or killed in the United States, due to deliberate owner neglect. The following headlines and links provide details of these cases. The photos accompanying these stories have been deliberately withheld as many of them are too shocking, showing horses who resemble concentration camp survivors.

March 23, 2009 - Virginia SPCA branch takes 41 horses into care - The animals are described as malnourished [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/03/130.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/03/130.shtml)

March 28, 2009 - Forty-five horses removed from property - Authorities have seized about 45 horses from an Oregon property [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/03/163.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/03/163.shtml)

April 23, 2009 - 100 horses signed over to rescue groups, 60 more dead - More than 100 horses described by an equine welfare organisation as emaciated have been formally surrendered to two horse rescue groups in the US. The horses at 3-Strikes Ranch, in Morrill County, Nebraska, were legally surrendered to horse rescue groups Habitat for Horses and Lifesavers Foundation [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/04/138.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/04/138.shtml)

May 15, 2009 - Nearly 60 horses taken from Texas property - Fifty-eight horses said to be in poor condition have been seized from a North Texas property by two horse rescue groups, backed by police [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/05/096.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/05/096.shtml)

July 20, 2009 - Ailing Clydesdales seized in British Columbia - Three ailing Clydesdale horses are under veterinary care after they were seized from a property in British Columbia by SPCA cruelty officers [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/07/111.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/07/111.shtml)

August 7, 2009 - 177 Horses seized from Thoroughbred breeder - US thoroughbred breeder Ernest Paragallo has been indicted on 35 animal cruelty charges by a grand jury in New York. The charges followed the seizure of 177 horses, many of whom were malnourished, from a farm in Green County, south of Albany, in April [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/044.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/044.shtml)

August 18, 2009 - 76 Arabian horses seized from Texas ranch - Police in Texas have seized 76 Arabian horses from a property in Denton County over concerns about their condition [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/112.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/112.shtml)

August 20, 2009 - Eleven starving horses rescued in South Florida - Eleven starving horses, including five foals, have been rescued by the South Florida SPCA from a property in Southwest Dade County [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/131.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/131.shtml)

August 20, 2009 - Thirty-three horses seized by Florida authorities - Authorities in Florida have seized 33 horses from a Marion County property, some of them up to 227 kilograms ( 500 pounds) underweight. The Wednesday operation was the second major horse seizure in Florida this week [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/132.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/132.shtml)

August 21, 2009 - Police seize 85 horses in Oklahoma - Deputies have seized 85 horses in poor condition from a ranch in Garvin County, Oklahoma. Three of the animals had to be euthanized [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/143.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/143.shtml)

August 28, 2009 - More neglected horses seized in Florida - Five Paso Fino horses and a mule have been seized by the South Florida SPCA from a property in Miramar County [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/201.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/08/201.shtml)

September 23, 2009 - Six horses seized by police in Louisiana - Six horses seized by police in Louisiana have been surrendered to authorities and will be sold by auction this week [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/09/175.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/09/175.shtml)

October 10, 2009 - SPCA seizes 386 animals, including 35 horses - SPCA officers have seized 386 animals from a Texas property, including 35 horses. Most of the ponies - there are 34 miniatures and one paint - have foundered, the society says [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/10/072.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/10/072.shtml)

October 16, 2009 - Twelve horses seized in South Dakota - Authorities have seized 12 horses from a property in South Dakota and charges are pending against the owner [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/10/114.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/10/114.shtml)

November 26, 2009 - Eighty-four horses seized from Tennessee ranch - Eighty-four horses have been seized in Tennessee in a joint rescue operation involving the Cannon County Sheriff's Department and the Humane Society of the United States [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/11/171.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/11/171.shtml)

December 2, 2009 - Horse 700 pounds underweight in Ohio seizure - Authorities have seized 11 horses from a property in Newton Falls, Ohio. One Clydesdale was estimated to be 700 pounds underweight [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/12/019.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/12/019.shtml)

While it is disturbing to think that there was an 800% increase in large scale equine starvation cases in 2009, the news in 2010 appears to indicate that this year things will be even worse, as Horse Talk has already reported three major cases in the first month of the new year.

January 1, 2010 - Horse trainer arrested, 10 dead horses found on Ohio property [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2010/01/003.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2010/01/003.shtml)

January 21, 2010 - Horse owner guilty of 145 cruelty charges - A Nebraska man who promoted his ranch as being a haven for mustangs has been found guilty of 145 counts of felony animal cruelty [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2010/01/103.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2010/01/103.shtml)

January 24, 2010 - Police seize 31 horses from Oregon property - Thirty-one horses have been seized by authorities in Oregon and placed in care. Police say the horses were neglected and in most urgent need of care among the 116 horses on the rented 12-acre property in Mill City, Oregon [www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2010/01/119.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2010/01/119.shtml)

### **There are a wide variety of factors connected to these events**

**Financial** - As the job market in the United States continues to shrink, horse owners have less income. With mortgage failures mounting, the basic needs of horses take second place to saving the home and feeding the family.

**Rising Costs** - As the price of hay and petrol continues to increase, horse owners are required to pay more to feed and transport their animals.

**Aging Population** - As the Baby Boomer generation ages, many of them are deserting the equestrian show rings and social events which held their interest when they were younger. This shrinking pool of horse riders is not being replenished by younger generations.

**Over Population** - Thanks to a variety of social influences, including the rise of romantic 1950s television programs which glorified horse ownership, the late 20th century saw a tremendous growth in the number of back-yard breeders who raised horses based on emotional desire, not actual daily need. In addition to personal profit, these people grew horses as evidence of social prestige and as tokens of their tribal identity. The result was that by 2005 North America was awash in horses which had no physical function. In many of the cases documented by Horse Talk, it is these emotional equine markers, being kept by horse hoarders, which are now being found starved to death.

**Hocus Pocus Horses** – As the motorized age advances, the demise of once commonly held equestrian wisdom is being replaced by a growing body of books and lectures wherein hocus pocus horsemanship is being advocated instead. Works suggesting that horses originated in Atlantis, or are angelic messengers, appeal to human emotional desires, while neglecting everyday equine realities. The rise in these belief systems has strengthened a growing belief that, unlike unwanted household dogs or cats, who are routinely euthanized and disposed of by county facilities, the life of every horse must be preserved at all costs.

**Cultural Taboos** – Adding to the difficulty of the problem is the deep-seated cultural taboo against allowing the eating of horse meat. A ground-breaking study by the LRG-AF documented how this taboo originated in 732 A.D. when Pope Gregory III outlawed the consumption of horse meat, in an effort to forcibly convert the horse-eating pagan Vikings. Ironically, though Italy is now the world's most enthusiastic consumer of equine meat products, the religious taboo, which still holds sway in England and the United States, has had a largely under-reported effect on recent equine events  
[www.horsetalk.co.nz/features/vikings-153.shtml](http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/features/vikings-153.shtml)

**Emotional Evasion** – The rise in unwanted horses has mirrored the dramatic increase in equine rescue facilities. While many of these efforts are well intentioned and operated, a number of so-called rescuers have exploited the public's trust by taking funds and then neglecting their equine charges.

**Equine Slaughter** - In the past, unwanted horses were sold to equine slaughter facilities in the United States. The closure of those plants has withdrawn a financial incentive previously available to people with unwanted horses.

**Alternative Costs of Disposal** - Other avenues of equine disposal involve techniques, equipment and costs which already financially burdened horse owners may not know or have at their disposal. For example, few horse owners know how to humanely kill their animals. The costs of renting equipment capable of digging holes large enough to dispose of one horse are high and a veterinarian's involvement is often needed.

**Legal Implications** - Because of the wormers and drugs routinely administered to North American horses, many states have increasingly strict rules about the disposal of equine carcasses. Thus, even if owners of unwanted horses wish to dispose of them on their own property, environmental restrictions may prohibit them from legally doing so.

The result is that in addition to driving horses prices to all time record lows, all of these factors have helped to create a vast continental pool of millions of unwanted, and unneeded, animals. As if any additional evidence of confirmation was needed, a case has just been registered against an Oregon woman who, though claiming to rescue equines, has been charged with starving and neglecting more than a hundred horses.

The influential North American equine blog, Fugly Horse of the Day, has been urgently calling for the social reform of the North American equestrian scene. In a recent entry, she wrote, "One of the most important things we need to do to solve the unwanted horse problem in this country is breed more intelligently — as in, fewer numbers and higher quality -  
[www.fuglyblog.com](http://www.fuglyblog.com)

With a decimated market, a declining number of riders, and an array of counterproductive cultural, social and religious factors at work, the LRG-AF predicts that 2010 will be a year wherein record numbers of horse owners, having found they can neither sell nor feed their animals, will be arrested and prosecuted on charges of large scale equine starvation and neglect. In addition to the enormous harm imposed upon these mute equine victims, these arrests will result in immense costs to state and local law enforcement agencies, who are already working under a severe financial strain.

In conclusion, the LRG-AF believes that American state and county officials should immediately instigate a nation wide investigation designed to offer a low cost equine euthanasia and disposal option to those people who have unwanted horses. The Long Rider Plan would thus offer horses a dignified demise, horse owners an ethical option and law enforcement a tremendous savings.

To learn more about the LRG-AF's multi-faceted study of equine slaughter and hippophagy, please [click here](#).