



King of the Wind...  
or Basashi with Rice?

## Description

# What do horses mean to Canadians?

By **Sinikka Crosland**

*Black Beauty* and *King of the Wind* will always reign as treasured classics in my own heart's library, as will the *Black Stallion* books penned by Walter Farley more than half a century ago. Now, lost in an era of iPods, cool apps and video games, I can't help but hope that kids across Canada are still enjoying the equine adventures that catapulted my ten-year-old self from the exhilaration of riding a saddle-free stallion along a tropical beach, to the depths of bittersweet sorrow at the grave of the Godolphin Arabian. Even in those days, when the path of life was tackled with bare feet and 10-cent cream sodas, a fascinating world of horse literature bestowed its laughter and tears on young readers like me. And from those stories arose my early stirrings of empathy for these noble animals that have pulled our wagons, ploughed our fields, and allowed us to straddle their backs for our riding pleasure.

In many ways, horses still decorate our culture as beloved icons of elegantly unrestrained motion, Olympian strength and breath-taking speed. They excel at Spruce Meadows, take our breath away on the racetrack, and make us proud to be living in Canada where we can witness the perfect unison of RCMP riders and mounts.



Image: Vickie Colgan

There is no doubt that many Canadians love horses. We admire their beauty, their intelligence, and their willingness to serve us. But just how much of the word ‘serve’ do we actually understand, as it relates to these animals? In fact, how Canadian is it to *eat* horses?

A small percentage of our citizens do exactly that, mainly in the province of Quebec, where certain restaurants serve horsemeat and where some supermarkets carry a supply. Still another small percentage of our society indulges in the horsemeat trade, which involves the world of livestock auctions, feedlots, and equine slaughterhouses. It may surprise some readers that Canada butchers more than 50,000 horses annually. Their meat is subsequently shipped to countries of Europe and Asia for human consumption.

A lesser-known aspect of the trade is the air transport of horses to Japan for culinary purposes. We export over 5,000 live horses annually to Japan, where they are slaughtered for *basashi* (horsemeat sashimi), a delicacy consisting of thin slices of meat served raw.

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Image: Animal Rights Center Japan

Typically large 'draft' breeds, these gentle giants are crammed into small wooden crates covered in netting for their overseas journey. As if the betrayal of homeland slaughter is not enough, the industry whisks them off to a foreign nation where all Canadian control over acceptable practices is lost. On that note, I should add that such practices even in our own country have been criticized from a humane perspective, as horses are not easy to kill. Undercover video has documented up to eleven stunning attempts before the goal of insensibility has been achieved. Horses are good at fighting for their lives.

Further, it is evident that the suffering begins long before the overseas flight and the kill floor. Horses destined for death overseas are housed in crowded, filthy Canadian feedlots and many suffer from infected wounds and various injuries. Some horses have been raised specifically for meat in Canada, but others have already endured the rigours of auction and transport from distant regions of the United States. Photographs and video taken at recipient Japanese feedlots portray similarly crowded conditions littered with fly-infested manure as well as health-compromised animals.



Image: Animal Rights Center Japan

'Access-to-Information records have revealed numerous casualties... the devastating deaths of six horses that perished during a flight ... a horse found upside-down in his crate.'

Live horses earmarked for slaughter depart Canada from three airports – Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg. Typically, the horses are herded onto large transport trucks at Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) quarantine stations, and are moved to the airport. Transfer from truck to wooden crate generally takes place late at night. The horses, often crammed three to four per container, must wait on the tarmac until loading onto the aircraft begins, usually around mid-morning. No food or water is offered to them while they are crated, and flight time to Japan is 10 to 12 hours. Canada's inadequate transport regulations permit horses to have food and water withheld for up to 36 hours. Access-to-Information records have revealed numerous casualties, including the devastating deaths of six horses that perished during a flight and, on a different occasion, a horse found upside-down in his crate.

Why Canada allows such suffering is the million-dollar question – to the tune of over \$14 million, in fact, in 2016. That amount translates to 5,839 horses exported to Japan for slaughter last year.





Image: Voice for Animals

But there's more: Since 2012, the industry has come under fire for not being in compliance with the law. The Health of Animals Regulations (HAR) state that no more than one horse over 14 hands high can occupy a single crate and, further, that the horses' heads must not come into contact with the ceiling of their container. Yet photographic and video evidence captured at Calgary and Edmonton airports, as recently as 2017, illustrates that these two protective sections of the HAR are routinely ignored.

'Many horses in Canada and the U.S. have not been raised as food animals and have been treated with drugs toxic to humans.'

Also of concern is the matter of prohibited drug residues lurking in horse steaks and basashi. Many horses in Canada and the U.S. have not been raised as food animals and have been treated with drugs toxic to humans. However for the sake of profitable trade with other countries, such details tend to be overlooked or ignored.

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Until

new legislation is passed to protect horses, these noble animals will continue to be victims of the slaughter industry. There is no better time than now for Canadians to convey a message to their Members of Parliament – that horses deserve better.

For more information on live exports of horses for slaughter (or equine slaughter in general), and what you can do to help, please visit [defendhorsescanada.org](http://defendhorsescanada.org)

Feature image: Vickie Colgan

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this article are those of its author and do not reflect the opinions of WestmountMag.ca, its publishers or editors.

Read also: [A cruel detour to the slaughterhouse](#)



**Sinikka Crosland** is a long-time animal activist. She is the Executive Director of The Canadian Horse Defence Coalition (based in Westbank, British Columbia) and co-founder, past president and advisor for The Responsible Animal Care Society (based in Kelowna, British Columbia).



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