

Developer Vows to Build Horse Plant

MOUNTAIN GROVE, Mo. (AP) — Opposition from some residents will not stop a Wyoming company from building a plant in southwest Missouri to slaughter horses and process the meat for human consumption, the company said.

Sue Wallis, a Wyoming legislator who is chief executive officer of Unified Equine, met Monday with a large crowd at the Wright County Livestock Auction to discuss plans for the plant. She said she was not swayed by opposition to the plant.

"Discussion's over. Make all the noise you want. We're going into business," Wallis said.

Wallis created the company last November after Congress approved a bill allowing the U.S. Department of Agriculture to begin inspections again for horse meat plants. She said Unified Equine will complete its feasibility study in the next month and a half, and hopes to have a plant open in southwest Missouri by September, KY3-TV reported (<http://bit.ly/yqvKRm> [1]).

The company has said the plant could eventually process up to 200 horses a day in a single shift and that the meat would be distributed to ethnic and specialty markets in the U.S. and abroad.

Wallis said the company is no longer considering a vacant building near Mountain Grove as the site for the plant.

"Might be really close to Mountain Grove, might be a ways away, but it will be somewhere in southwest Missouri," she said.

Unified Equine chose the region because of its access to good highways and access to horses, she said.

"If you draw a 400- or 500-mile circle around southwest Missouri, you encapsulate more than 30 percent of the horses that are in the U.S.," Wallis said.

An earlier meeting in Mountain Grove to discuss the plant erupted into yelling and heckling of a plant supporter. Missouri State Highway Patrol troopers were present at Monday's meeting to ensure order. Video cameras were not allowed inside the meeting, but the auction barn overflowed with curious residents.

Opponents contend the plant would bring pollution and crime to the region, as well as a stigma for slaughtering horses. Supporters contend the plant would bring much-needed jobs and help reduce an over-population of horses.

"We always need jobs. There's a lot of people not working around here. Plus,

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hopefully it'll bring the price of horses back up," said Jeff Walkowe of Dunn.

Protestors believe the plant would be bad for their horse companions and community.

Michelle Collins of Norwood said the horse slaughtering plant would ruin the Ozarks' way of life.

"It's just a love of our life, and it's something we've always done together as a family, and we are definitely opposed to the horse slaughter plant," Collins said.

But Mindy Patterson of the Missouri Equine Council said there are hundreds of thousands of unwanted horses nationwide.

"I implore them to give heed to the thought that these horses are suffering a painful death of starvation," Patterson said.

Information from: KYTV-TV, www.ky3.com [2]

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