

**Question for oral answer O-000054/2023
to the Commission**

Rule 136

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on behalf of the The Left Group

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Subject: Recent EU-Audits identifying that Uruguayan and Argentinian meat from horses with unreliable sworn declarations and unknown drug history is entering the EU

On 20 and 23 October 2023, the Commission published audits carried out in Argentina and Uruguay on the production of horse meat intended for export to the EU. During both inspections, auditors identified that compliance with EU veterinary medical treatments and residency requirements is significantly compromised. The auditors concluded that guarantees regarding EU food safety requirements are 'insufficiently reliable and, on some occasions false'. According to the auditors, actions taken following the 2018 audit have not been effective in addressing these issues.

In Argentina and Uruguay, it is common for horses during the course of their lives to be administered drugs such as phenylbutazone. In Uruguay, injectable testosterone may also be administered. In the EU this would lead to the definitive exclusion of the animals from slaughter for human consumption. Given the persistent traceability issues identified, can the Commission guarantee that horse meat imported from Uruguay and Argentina does not contain any traces of prohibited drugs?

Imports of horse meat from Brazil into the EU have been suspended since 2017. The auditors expressed concerns over horse smuggling from Brazil to Uruguay. Does the Commission agree that, when Brazilian horses are smuggled into Uruguay, there is a risk that meat from Brazilian horses ends up in the EU, given the traceability issues identified? Why has the Commission not suspended horse meat imports from Uruguay and Argentina as a result, given that food safety cannot be guaranteed?

During recent official pre-announced EU audits, only a limited number of horses were present in the inspected Uruguayan facilities. During previous audits in 2020 and 2018, EU auditors had also noticed in both Uruguay and Argentina that the pastures of slaughterhouses were either empty or that there were fewer horses than usual, and that these animals were in good condition.

Observations by the non-governmental organisation AWF/TSB¹ before, during and after the EU audit in Uruguay confirm, however, that serious animal welfare issues persist, such as shortcomings related to shelter and available feed, critically ill and injured horses not receiving medical care and the mistreatment of horses.

Does the Commission agree that the difference in findings between the pre-announced EU audits and the unannounced observations by TSB/AWF suggests that there has been an attempt by Uruguayan operators to manipulate EU audits, and does the Commission agree that the serious animal welfare issues documented by TSB/AWF are an additional reason to immediately suspend all horse meat imports from Uruguay and Argentina?

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¹ Animal Welfare Foundation / Tierschutzverbund Zürich, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFJIGALxgws>.