

# Horse Euthanasia – On Farm Options

It's an unfortunate reality that from time to time, an animal will become sick or injured and must be euthanized. There can also be other situations including animal health, financial or times when caregivers are unable to care for their animals which may require animals to be euthanized. In some cases, it may be a larger number of animals than farms are equipped to handle compared to normal culling requirements.

**This resource is designed to give farmers, stock persons, and veterinarians different options for euthanizing horses on farm.**

## *Important notes for euthanasia:*

- When euthanasia is the best option, it's important to make the decision in a timely manner to minimize the animal's pain or distress.
- Proper training and properly maintained equipment are required to protect animal welfare and human safety.
- Euthanasia requires proper equipment for handling and restraint. Handlers should be aware of low stress animal handling and videos may be ordered from <http://grandin.com/inc/low.stress.handling.video.html>
- Please note that when euthanizing any animal it is important to check for signs of insensibility and to confirm death before moving on. Signs of insensibility include:
  - No natural blinking
  - No breathing or vocalization
  - No jaw tone
  - No organized limb movement i.e. attempting to lift head

For more information:



**Farm & Food Care Ontario**

**Phone: 519-837-1326**

**E-mail: [info@farmfoodcare.org](mailto:info@farmfoodcare.org)**

**[www.farmfoodcare.org](http://www.farmfoodcare.org)**

**[www.livestockwelfare.com](http://www.livestockwelfare.com)**

## Gunshot

### What is it?

Any non-restricted firearm in working condition can be used as a tool to euthanize an animal.

### How does it work?

The penetration and concussive force generated by the bullet within the skull and brain result in death.

### What can I use it on?

A 0.22 caliber long rifle solid point bullet is sufficient for young animals.

Options for large animals such as mature cattle (including bulls), sows, boars, horses and elk include the 12, 16, and 20 gauge shotgun loaded with slugs or No. 2, 4, or 6, size birdshot.

### Where to get it?

Firearms can be purchased at various locations across Ontario.

**Please note that you must possess a valid Possession and Acquisition Licence (PAL) administered by the RCMP and have passed the Canadian Firearms Safety Course.**

### How much does it cost?

Price will vary depending on size of firearm and ammunition used.

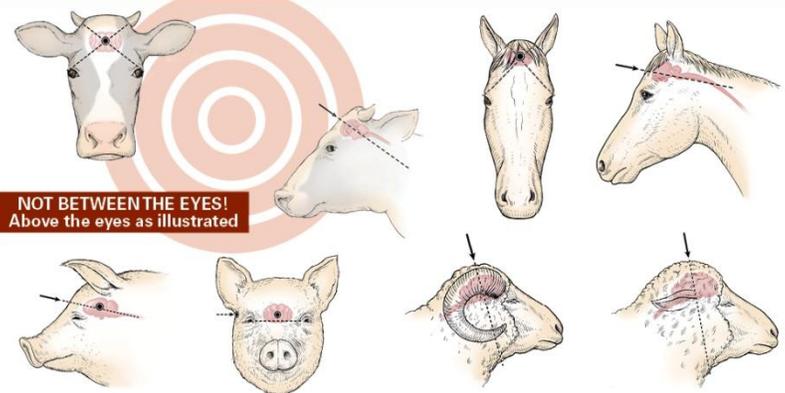
### For more information:

<http://vetmed.iastate.edu/HumaneEuthanasia>

*Please note that when using a firearm for euthanasia purposes both operator and bystander safety should be considered.*



## Anatomical Sites for Livestock Euthanasia



### Firearm and Bullet/Shotshell Selection for Euthanasia of Livestock

**Handguns and rifles** - A .22 caliber rifle is sufficient for young animals, but results are not consistent in adult animals. A .22 magnum or larger caliber firearm is preferred.

**Shotguns** - A 12, 16 or 20 gauge are preferred loaded with slugs are best, but birdshot No. 2, 4, or 6 can be used.

### Confirmation of Death

Regardless of the method of euthanasia used, death must be confirmed before disposal of the animal. The following should be used to evaluate consciousness or to confirm death.

1. Lack of a heartbeat
2. Lack of respiration
3. Lack of a corneal reflex
4. Presence of rigor mortis



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University Extension

<http://vetmed.iastate.edu/HumaneEuthanasia>



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## Anesthetic Overdose (administered by vets only)

### What is it?

Under some circumstances, you may have to ask a veterinarian to euthanize an animal with an overdose of an anesthetic. These drugs are strictly controlled and must be administered by a veterinarian. This method of euthanasia requires intravenous access.

The meat from animals killed in this manner cannot enter the food chain. Therefore the disposal of the carcass presents a problem. Please check with your local municipality with respect to disposal of these carcasses.

### How does it work?

An overdose of barbiturates is administered to depress the central nervous system, causing deep anesthesia progressing to respiratory and cardiac arrest.

### What can I use it on?

Anesthetic overdose is typically used on larger animals that might be difficult to euthanize with other methods.

### Where to get it?

Contact your veterinarian.

### How much does it cost?

Please consult with your veterinarian.



### Disclaimer

This inventory list is intended to assist producers in making ethical and responsible decisions regarding animals at risk. Producers are encouraged to consult with their herd health veterinarian for final culling decisions, as this guide should not be considered as the sole resource in these matters. The authors do not make any representations, warranties or conditions, either express or implied, with respect to any of the information contained in this guide.

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