BRUSSELS (9 Feb. 2013) – In response to news reports that up to **100 percent horsemeat** has been **found** in **Findus beef** products **marketed in France**, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Humane Society International calls on European Union officials to protect consumer health and immediately ban the sale of horsemeat coming from North America.

"It is alarming to learn that European consumers may have fallen victim to large-scale food fraud, unwittingly consuming horsemeat products incorrectly labelled as beef," said Jo Swabe Ph.D., HSI European Union director. "Consumer alarm is understandable as many people would ordinarily avoid eating horse flesh. Humane Society International calls on officials to acknowledge the potential risk to public health and safety, as this horsemeat could have originated from anywhere in the world, including from North America, and to immediately ban its sale from North America." As the focus of the European horsemeat investigation turns to French supplier Comigel, HSI notes that there is a strong likelihood that some of this horsemeat has been imported into the EU from either Canada or Mexico. France is one of the biggest importers of North American horsemeat. Official EU statistics show that in 2011 alone, 1,836,200 tonnes of horsemeat valued at €6,566,685 was imported to France from Canada; another 1,204,500 tonnes valued at €5,062,025 was imported from Mexico. The majority of horsemeat exported to the EU from both Canada and Mexico actually originates from U.S. horses shipped over the border in horrific long-distance transports. France also receives horsemeat imports from other Member States, a proportion of which are actually re-exports from Canada and Mexico too. In addition, French statistics show that a total 16,970 horses were slaughtered domestically during the same year.

There are significant concerns about horsemeat of U.S. origin containing residues from veterinary drugs that in the EU are banned for use in animals killed for food. American horses, whether companion animals, show horses, pleasure horses or race horses, receive a myriad of veterinary drugs, including phenylbutazone, throughout their lifetimes. Recent audits conducted by the European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office in Canada and Mexico have concluded that the medical treatment records for U.S. horses are insufficient to guarantee that standards equivalent to those provided for by EU legislation are applied.

Horse slaughter facts:

· A 2010 EU regulation requires that only meat from horses with a known medicinal treatment history can be exported to the EU. However horsemeat from American horses

continues to be imported into the EU.

· A recent retail investigation conducted by HSI reveals that many EU consumers may be completely unaware of the origin of horsemeat -- or that they are buying horsemeat at all -- due to inadequate labelling.

· In July 2012, residues of the drugs phenylbutazone and clenbuterol were found in a consignment of horsemeat imported to Belgium from Canada. This horsemeat was distributed domestically as well as to France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. This also illustrates how contaminated horsemeat imports from third countries can end up anywhere in Europe for further processing. EU legislation requires that only 10 percent of horsemeat consignments from Canada are sampled for testing at the point of entry; 100 percent of consignments from Mexico must be sampled for residue testing.