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הכל חי עמותת עזרה לבעלי חיי - 37060					

## Agriculture Ministry slammed for promoting breeding of horses

*Animal rights group Hakol Chai: Horses will be used for racing – which is cruel and will bypass anti-gambling legislation*



### Holy Sea Biscuit!

### Rights group froths over funds for horse breeding

• By SHARON UDASIN

Animal rights group Hakol Chai has launched a campaign against the Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry's August decision to invest NIS 750,000 in horse breeding, charging that such horses will be raised predominantly for racing and will likewise be subject to cruel consequences.

The increase in funds toward horse breeding, Hakol Chai argued in a statement on Monday, is in reality a ministerial effort to promote the establishment of horse racing and gambling without due legislation, stemming from a government decision to establish Israel's first hippodrome in 2004. With a horse racing industry would come animal brutality, as racehorses are often drugged for enhanced performance and slaughtered when they can no longer perform due to horse

overpopulation, according to a statement from the group.

"Gambling on horse racing cannot legally take place in Israel unless it is first approved by the Knesset," said Hakol Chai's professional manager, Tal Sahar, in the statement. "Yet even before a bill to permit gambling on horse racing has been introduced into the Knesset, the ministry offered more than NIS 750,000 in public funds to farms willing to breed race horses."

While the Agriculture Ministry did confirm that its increased efforts to strengthen the horse breeding industry do stem partially from the 2004 hippodrome decision, a ministry representative told *The Jerusalem Post* the office has no part in promoting gambling.

"The ministry began to raise the level of the horse breeding industry similarly to what is accepted in West-

ern countries, and to support the advancement of activities related to promoting the welfare of the horses – growth, multiplicity, training, treatment, living conditions and economic management," the ministry told the *Post* in response to Hakol Chai's allegations. "The decision and this tender indeed rely on the 2004 government decision concerning the establishment of a hippodrome, yet it is not intended to strengthen the decision but rather to provide a fitting resolution to a developing industry in many aspects that are unrelated to the hippodrome operations, and therefore the claim that the issue of support requires legislation in the Knesset is to be denied."

Not only will the newly bred horses be used for racing, but they will also be used for therapeutic and rehabilitative purposes, as well as bolster the economies of peripheral areas with new industry, the ministry said.

Adamant in her opinion that the horses would be mistreated, however, Hakol Chai CEO Nina Natelson slammed the ministry for attempting to get racehorses a legal exemption from Israel's Animal Protection Law.

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"All of these cruelties – it'll be a free-for all," she said. "It's on the backs of horses – nobody cares about the welfare of the animals."

While the ministry confirmed it was in fact trying to remove racehorses from the Animal Protection Law, the office said it is aiming for the horses protected under different, slightly less strict legislation, rather than no legislation at all, as is common throughout the Western world.

"Bad things happen to horses who aren't producing money for their owners, so a lot of ex-racehorses end up in situations like becoming cart horses – they're sold from hand to hand," Natelson contended, arguing that Israel doesn't have room for a surplus of horses.

In England, Natelson explained, the unwanted retired racehorses end up on dinner plates in France and Belgium.

But the ministry argued that the racehorses are well-treated, noting that organizations must receive permits from the ministry's Veterinary Services in order to hold a race, and throughout the entire race day, a ministry veterinarian is present to

supervise the proceedings. Ever since the ministry implemented a method for supervising horse races in December 2006, no deaths or accidents to the horses have occurred, the ministry said.

"The Agriculture Ministry and its minister attach great importance to the maintenance of animal welfare in general and to the welfare of racehorses in particular, according to the strictest standards

accepted internationally," the ministry said.

Horse racing, however, has not occurred in great numbers since the hippodrome approval in 2004. After granted government consent, Israel's first and only hippodrome was constructed in the Gilboa region near Afula, with opening day at the races occurring in October 2006.

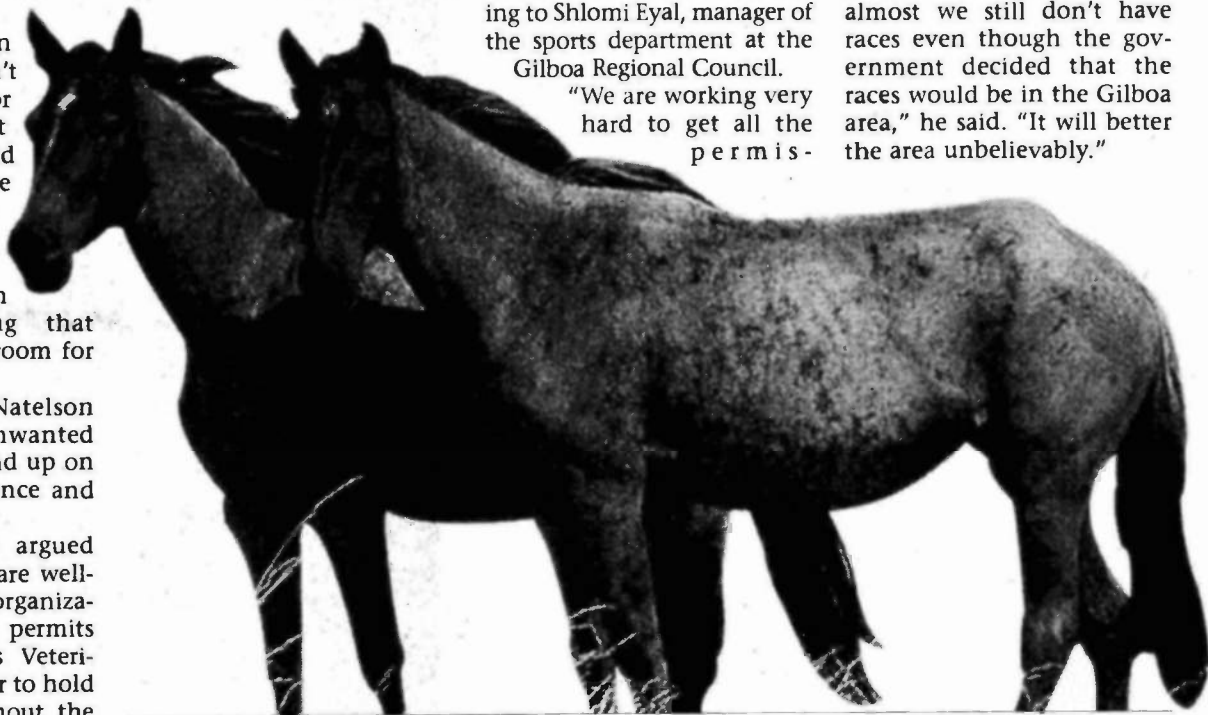
Since then, only about two races – small hobby, show races – have occurred, according to Shlomi Eyal, manager of the sports department at the Gilboa Regional Council.

"We are working very hard to get all the permits

sions. It's not easy to be able to open races. It's on the way," Eyal said. "There are only a few countries in the world that don't have horse races and we are one of them. We would love to have them."

Despite the concerns of animal rights activists, Eyal said the council was firm in its desire to bring horse racing to the region.

"It's impossible to even understand that in 2012 almost we still don't have races even though the government decided that the races would be in the Gilboa area," he said. "It will better the area unbelievably."



THE AGRICULTURE MINISTRY admits the horses will be used for racing, but also for therapeutic and rehabilitative purposes. (Francois Marchal/Wikipedia)