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A company owned by a Wyoming state legislator is looking at opening a horse meat processing plant in south-central Missouri.

The company, United Equine, whose chief executive is Wyoming representative Sue Wallis, is studying a site near Mountain Grove, Missouri, for the plant, which would slaughter and process horses for human consumption. The company is currently conducting a feasibility study, Wallis told Meatingplace in an e-mail.

“That phase will probably take a couple of months, which if we find that it is a fit--so far all indications are good--we will move into an aggressive timeline to develop and implement a full business plan that (if everything goes right, and nothing goes wrong) would have us opening the doors and beginning operations around September,” she wrote.

The company is looking at a site in the southern Midwest because it is where the majority of the U.S. horse herd is concentrated, Wallis said.

“This is envisioned to be a flagship model for the country, and a facility that we can rightfully show off,” she wrote.

Horses that would be processed will be mature animals weighing 1,100 to 1,300 pounds, and would come from a variety of sources, she said. “Some will be older horses that have been used for some other purpose. Others will be horses that are younger but unwanted or unusable for any other purpose for a variety of reasons which could range from being dangerous and untrainable to being undesirable because of poor conformation, injury, or blemish,” Wallis wrote.

The horses would have been kept on feed for a period of time to ensure quality, she said. “This produces the quality of meat that is sought after by the European and Asian consumer, and which we anticipate will be well received by specialty, gourmet, ethnic, and health conscious consumers in the United States,” Wallis said.

She noted that horse meat is lean and high in protein, iron and omega-3 fatty acids. The company as partnered with Chevideco, a leading European horse meat company with markets in 23 countries that is growing 15 percent per year, Wallis said.

A U.S. appropriations bill passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Barack Obama in November lifted a prohibition on funding USDA inspections of horse slaughter facilities. (See “Lifting of U.S. horse slaughter ban renews debate,” on Meatingplace, Dec. 1, 2011.)

The plant would initially employ 40 to 50 people and could have the capacity to slaughter 200 horses a day in one shift. Wallis said the animal handling facilities would be designed by Temple Grandin.