

# ✓ Animal Welfare Some seized horses may be returned

By STEVE PEREZ  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Authorities are negotiating for the return of some of the 44 Arabian horses back to the Bonny Doon area ranch where they were seized Oct. 30 for alleged mistreatment.

District Attorney Art Danner said the conditions under which about 20 horses would be returned, would have to be agreed to by the defendants in the animal neglect and cruelty case, and monitored by the SPCA.

"They were in the process of attempting to determine if some horses could be, under very strict conditions, returned," Danner said. "And only those horses that were the subject matter of the charges would be kept, or those in need of further feeding programs."

According to Santa Cruz attorney

Gordon Salisbury, who represents Mustafa Sabankaya, one of three brothers charged in the case, the agreement could be reached and the animals returned as early as today.

"It hinges, of course, on whether they're going to come to an agreement about proper care and our officers going up and checking," said SPCA spokeswoman Judy Cassada, adding it would be up to a veterinarian to determine which animals would be released.

The District Attorney's office ordered the seizure of the horses after an investigation by state humane officers who suspected the horses were malnourished because of underfeeding.

Nezih Sabankaya told the Sentinel on the first day of the massive, three-day roundup that the animals were given plenty to eat.

Since then, authorities have received a number of letters from people who said they had been to the ranch and witnessed no evidence of underfeeding or malnourishment. Copies have been forwarded to the Sentinel and other local media.

Although a number of the 44 horses seized were in "fair" condition at the ranch, prosecutors ordered the seizure of all of them, reasoning they had all been treated the same.

They have been under SPCA care at portable corrals at its headquarters on Seventh Avenue.

Since their seizure, the animals have proved themselves expensive critters to care for and appeals for cash, volunteers and horse-care items have been issued regularly.

Salisbury said the legal action was

been unwarranted.

"My client is a world-class Arabian horse breeder who would never do anything to jeopardize the welfare of a horse," Salisbury said. "The situation as it exists now results from a series of over-reactions following a breakdown in communications, between my client and the SPCA."

The SPCA's Cassada declined to comment on Salisbury's assertion.

The Sabankaya brothers, Mustafa, Nezih and Semih, all face one count of animal neglect, and one count of animal cruelty. They are scheduled to be arraigned in a local Municipal Court Dec. 4.

In addition, Nezih and a ranch employee face charges of obstructing a peace officer after they allegedly tried to hamper the roundup.