

# UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION - 2008 RESOLUTION

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**RESOLUTION NUMBER:** 40 APPROVED

**SOURCE:** COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL WELFARE

**SUBJECT MATTER:** SORING OF TENNESSEE WALKING AND OTHER  
SHOW HORSES

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Soring of horses is the practice of purposely and deliberately causing pain to a horse's front legs and hoofs that result in the exaggeration of the horses natural gait in show competition.

Soring is prohibited by the Horse Protection Act of 1970.

During the 2008 Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued 187 violations of the Horse Protection Act.

Calling this practice "one of the most significant welfare issues affecting any breed or discipline," the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) issued a White Paper recommending the elimination of the abusive practice of soring.

## **RESOLUTION:**

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) supports the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) call for the elimination of the abusive practice of soring and requests that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Animal Care (AC), in cooperation with industry, continue their vigilant monitoring of the Horse Protection Act of 1970.

## **RESPONSE:**

### **USDA, Animal Care**

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Animal Care (AC), is pleased to acknowledge the receipt of the USAHA Resolution 40, regarding the soring of Tennessee Walking and other show horses. This resolution calls for the elimination of the abusive practice of soring and requests the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), APHIS, AC, in cooperation with industry, to continue our vigilant monitoring of the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970.

We agree that soring is one of the most significant welfare issues affecting any equine breed or discipline and appreciate the opportunity to provide you with more information

about our enforcement efforts. As you mention, the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) issued a white paper on August 7, 2008 with recommendations on how the horse industry can work collaboratively to end the cruel practice of soring horses to accentuate their gaits. We believe the AAEP provided sound criticisms and suggestions, and we take all of its recommendations very seriously, particularly the recommendation to eliminate the Designated Qualified Persons (DQP) program. The 1976 amendments to the HPA mandated that enforcement responsibility be shared among Federal and industry-certified inspectors, and they also imposed a \$500,000 yearly appropriation limit on the enforcement of the HPA. To meet our mandated responsibilities, USDA began certifying horse industry organizations (HIOs) to hire DQPs. This arrangement extended our enforcement capabilities to cover more horse shows than could otherwise be included, given the aforementioned budget limitations. Any changes to USDA's current HPA enforcement arrangement would require Congressional action.

We believe this approach allows us to effectively enforce the HPA while maximizing the participation of the HIOs. Since 1999, our officials have worked with certified HIOs to develop Horse Protection Operating Plans. Signatory HIOs are required to consistently apply a uniform penalty structure to all HPA violators, even when APHIS officials are not in attendance. We also strive to ensure that DQPs and APHIS veterinary medical officers (VMOs) follow the same inspection standards. To this end, we conduct joint DQP-VMO training sessions where DQPs and VMOs train side-by-side in an intense program that incorporates both classroom elements and hands-on practice. In addition, as recommended in the AAEP white paper, APHIS has worked to develop new technological tools for use in HPA enforcement to make the inspection process more uniform and objective. Two years ago, we announced the use of gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS)—a technique that identifies the composition of chemical mixtures that are sometimes applied to horses' legs—as an HPA enforcement tool. GC/MS makes it easier to detect the presence of numbing substances and determine when horses have been subjected to chemical and/or mechanical means of soring. In 2008, APHIS introduced thermography—which employs the use of infrared cameras to detect heat and locate areas of inflammation—alongside our physical examinations. Thermography has been a useful tool to assist in the diagnosis of soring, and we have fully implemented its use within our inspection procedure for 2009.

We appreciate USAHA support and hope this information assures you of our commitment to enforcing the HPA. We will continue to work cooperatively with HIOs and other stakeholders to enhance public-private cooperation and maximize HPA enforcement. If you would like more information on USDA's HPA enforcement efforts, please visit the Horse Protection program's Web page at [www.aphis.usda.gov/animal](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal).