



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and Plant
Health Inspection
Service

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Animal Care Stakeholder Update

April 8, 2009

The following is a stakeholder update on the use of thermographic technology by Animal Care, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). As many of you know, APHIS announced its intentions to consider the use of thermography during Horse Protection Act (HPA) inspections in 2007. Since then, APHIS has piloted the use of thermography and trained its Veterinary Medical Officers on the technology.

Thermography is a technology that can assist in identifying abnormalities indicative of soring. Through the use of infrared cameras, thermography measures the surface temperatures of an object. This technology has been incorporated into diagnostic equipment used by medical professionals, devices that enable firefighters to see through smoke, and some night-vision equipment. In thermographic images, cooler areas appear blue, black, green or purple, while warmer areas appear yellow, orange, red or white.

Beginning with this show season, thermography will be integrated into the normal inspection process and used as an additional diagnostic tool for the detection of soring, the cruel and inhumane practice used to enhance the height and reach of a horse's gait. Horses can be sored in a number of ways including burning the animal's legs with caustic chemicals, using illegal shoes, or chains that are too heavy, among other methods.

During inspections, inspectors evaluate a horse's appearance and locomotion and physically examine the animal for any signs of pain, scars, blisters, or odors associated with soring practices. USDA also randomly swabs horses' legs to test for foreign substances.

The use of thermography will not replace these other methods of inspection nor will its use or associated protocols conflict with the operating plans in place for HPA enforcement. The technology will be used as a screening tool. Horse exhibitors, whose horses are deemed not normal based on thermographic results, will be given the option to either excuse themselves from the class without a penalty or undergo a more detailed inspection by an inspector. Flowcharts showing the inspection procedure are available on our web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/hp.



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Animal Care Stakeholder Update

Page 2

We remain committed to making continuous improvements to HPA enforcement and will do so both through the pursuit and use of technology as well as other methods. Our intention has always been to work with our industry partners and other interested parties to ensure that horses are protected from the cruel and inhumane practice of soring.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chester A. Gipson".

Chester A. Gipson
Deputy Administrator
Animal Care