

**HEART OF AMERICA
WALKING HORSE ASSOCIATION**

February 11, 2009

Dr. Chester Gipson
Deputy Administrator
USDA-APHIS
4700 River Rd, Ste 84
Riverdale, MD 20737-1234

Dear Dr. Gipson:

The new requirement that all tack be removed from every horse before inspection has caused concern by many in the industry, especially for those hobby, pleasure and owner amateur trained exhibitors who attend shows alone and have no help to handle their tack and who often show in multiple classes.

As you are aware, your proposed requirement will necessitate someone to handle the horse while another person removes the saddle, breast strap, and saddle pad. As we stated, many only attend shows by themselves and this would create a hardship for these exhibitors. Expensive tack will be left unattended with the possibility of theft or damage.

These same concerns hold true for performance and pleasure horse trainers. We understand your trepidation in the past and limiting the number of people in the inspection area. There will have to be more help to secure the saddles and tack as horses are lead through inspection and also during post-show inspection as more people will be required for the removal of tail braces. This can quickly become a safety issue.

Show managers are also expressing concern with the proposed requirements causing more delay between classes. Some have voiced their opinion that they will not affiliate their shows at all because of the logistical problems brought on by this requirement. This is a concern for HIOs as we want all

shows to affiliate to insure that every horse is properly inspected and is in compliance with the HPA.

We fully understand your concerns and propose a compromise so that shows can continue in a timely manner and VMO/DQPs can be assured that all horses are thoroughly inspected. We propose that saddles be left on horses as they enter inspection. Girth will be dropped on one side and the saddle may be raised to inspect underneath. Inspecting horses in such a manner will insure compliance and at the same time relieve the need for additional people while also allowing the shows to proceed at a normal pace.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and recommendations. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ted Nichols".

Heart of America

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