

The Virginia Equine Feed Assessment

A Good Thing For Virginia – A Good Thing For the Industry

In 2005, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation authorizing a statewide referendum of equine owners on the question of instituting an assessment, also known as a “checkoff”, on equine feeds. The process leading up to the referendum has begun; the voting is scheduled to take place during the month of May, 2006. Below you will find what you need to know about this beneficial program.

What is a “checkoff”? A checkoff is a self imposed assessment authorized through legislation and a vote of affected farmers, in this case equine owners. A simple majority decides whether or not the assessment will be collected. Many agricultural commodities have checkoffs, including beef cattle, dairy, cotton, corn and soybeans (familiar examples of checkoff projects include “*Pork: the other white meat,*” and “*Got Milk?*” ad campaigns).

What will the feed checkoff do? It will provide funding to the Virginia Horse Industry Board (VHIB) which will be utilized for market development, education, publicity, research, and promotion for the horse industry. These five program areas are mandated by the authorizing legislation.

Why do we need a feed checkoff? Virginia ranks among the top states for numbers of horses, horse sales and related economic activities (vets, blacksmiths, fences, tractors, trucks, etc.). However, it is widely acknowledged that there continues to be room for significant long-term growth in terms of both numbers and economic impact. Our horse industry is highly diverse and by nature segmented; a checkoff provides much needed resources not typically available from the state government or the private sector.

How will the feed checkoff help me? It will help the entire horse industry. Self-promotion is the best way to ensure long-term economic viability and assist with growth and expansion. Virginia is one of the largest equine states in America in both numbers and economic activity and this program will help us improve this position to the benefit of everyone involved. A self-imposed checkoff is the most effective, and sometimes the only, way to achieve this.

How much will it cost me as a horse owner? Should the referendum pass, the collection amount will be \$3 per ton, or 7.5 cents per fifty pound bag, of commercial feed labeled for equine use. It is estimated that the average horse in Virginia eats one ton of feed per year making your cost approximately \$3 per horse per year.

Who is in charge of the referendum procedure? The Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (VDACS) will be responsible for the conducting of the referendum.

Who can vote? Any Virginia horse owner is eligible to vote.

How do I qualify to vote? To be eligible to vote, you will need to fill out an official affidavit verifying you meet certain criteria as outlined in the authorizing legislation and the form must be notarized. These forms are available on the VDACS web site at www.vdacs.virginia.gov (look for the horse icon on the home page). If you do not have access to the internet you can call 804786-3952 and one will be mailed to you. You must submit an affidavit verifying you meet the eligibility requirements to VDACS by April 14, 2006 if you wish to vote in the referendum.

How do I vote? Once your eligibility has been certified by VDACS your name will be added to the list of eligible voters. On April 28th, ballots will be mailed to all certified, eligible voters. Completed ballots must be delivered by mail or in person to VDACS’ Richmond office no later than 5:00 p.m. on May 26, 2006.

Can my whole family vote? Voters in this referendum have to meet the following requirements: 1) be a resident of Virginia, 2) be of legal voting age, and 3) have documentation to prove ownership of at least one (1) horse. The voter eligibility form has more detailed information on exactly who can qualify to vote in the referendum.

How will the assessment be collected? The assessment would be formulated into the price you pay for equine feed from your distributor or feed store and paid annually to the Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services by the actual manufacturer of the product.

Who will be responsible for the money? The Virginia Horse Industry Board (VHIB) will have direct responsibility for funding projects in the five program areas mentioned above.

What is the VHIB? The VHIB was established in 1994 as the result of legislation and a statewide referendum. The VHIB is responsible for the promotion and economic development of the horse industry in Virginia and operates through the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. More information on the VHIB is available at their website www.vhib.org.

Who is the VHIB? The VHIB consists of twelve members. They are: the presidents of the Virginia Horse Council, the Virginia Thoroughbred Association, the Virginia Horse Shows Association, and the Virginia Quarter Horse Association, four at large members from the equine sector appointed by the Governor, a representative of the horse industry support services or professional community, an individual commercially involved in the horse industry, the extension horse specialist from Virginia Tech and the Commissioner of Agriculture.

How is the money spent? The money will be spent on programs generated by the VHIB or through competitive grants awarded to others by the VHIB which focus on the five areas designated in the enabling legislation -- market development, education, publicity, research, and promotion for the horse industry.

Who supports the checkoff? At the statewide level, the board's of directors of the Virginia Horse Council, the Virginia Thoroughbred Association, the Virginia Horse Shows Association, and the Virginia Quarter Horse Association along with the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation and the Virginia Agribusiness Council all support the referendum process. In addition, the enabling legislation passed in 2005 was supported by the Virginia Equine Study Task Force, a group of industry leaders appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture in 2004 to develop recommendations on ways to enhance the economic development of the state's equine industry.

Do other states have similar assessments? Two of our neighbors, Maryland and North Carolina, and Illinois currently have equine feed assessments in place.

Where do I go for more information? More information can be found on the Virginia Horse Council's web page www.virginiahorseCouncil.org (look for the Feed Checkoff link) and the Virginia Thoroughbred Association's (VTA) web page www.vabred.org . Or you can contact Pat Mullins, VA Horse Council President at 540-872-2523 or Glenn Petty, VTA Executive Director at 540-347-4313.