



April 30, 2012

Dr. Rachel Cezar
Horse Protection Coordinator
4700 River Road, Suite 6D03
Rockville, MD 20737

Re: USDA-APHIS: Horse Protection Program Listening Sessions

Dear Dr. Cezar:

The American Horse Council (AHC) appreciates the opportunity to submit these comments to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), pursuant to the recently-completed listening sessions APHIS' Animal Care Program held throughout the U.S. to obtain feedback on the Horse Protection Program. The AHC supports APHIS' efforts to strengthen enforcement of the Horse Protection Act (HPA). The AHC opposes any practice that might cause pain or distress to any horse under the HPA.

American Horse Council

The AHC is a Washington-based association that represents individual members and over 120 equine organizations before Congress and the federal regulatory agencies. AHC member organizations include breed registries, national and state equine associations, state horse councils, recreational associations, and organizations representing race tracks, horsemen, horse shows, veterinarians, farriers, rodeos, and other equine related stakeholders. The AHC also includes individual horse owners and breeders, veterinarians, farriers, trainers, professional, amateur, and recreational riders, and commercial suppliers. Individually, and through our organizational members, the AHC represents several hundred thousand horse owners and others involved in all sectors of the horse industry.

APHIS' Questions of Interest

Prior to the HPA listening sessions, APHIS published a list of questions the Agency was particularly interested in receiving feedback on from stakeholders. The AHC's comments are limited to addressing and responding to the following questions APHIS put forward in the context of how they might affect various breeds, shows, exhibits and activities that fall under the HPA.

- Should there be a prohibition of all action devices?

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- Should there be a prohibition of pads?

Action Devices and Pads

The AHC does not support an outright prohibition of all action devices or pads. A complete prohibition could result in unintended consequences that may not be in the best interest of the horse, various regulated breeds or various regulated exhibitors, shows or exhibitions.

Some devices and pads are used by a variety of breeds for the protection of the horse during showing and training. For example, certain devices, which may fit within the technical definition of “action devices” under the regulations, are used by certain breeds to protect a horse’s foot or to prevent over-striding. Additionally, a simple prohibition of all pads could adversely affect certain breeds that use them for legitimate purposes for the protection of the horse’s feet and limbs. Pads may serve several legitimate needs, such as:

- To protect the hoof from abrasions or penetration on hard or uneven surfaces;
- To provide a cushioning agent for the hoof and limb when working or showing surfaces are unduly hard or rough;
- To maintain the natural angle of the foot and pastern;
- To compensate for conformational abnormalities of the foot and limb;
- To aid in keeping the shoes intact on horses with thin-walled or brittle feet;
- To permit the use of packing under the pad to maintain proper softness and flexibility of the hoof;
- To protect the foot from the development of septic processes;
- To facilitate the application of therapeutic medication to the hoof;
- To increase or decrease support to the foot and limb as an aid in the treatment of lameness; and
- To build up the proper matching length and angle of any foot that has been broken or damaged.

Pads used in these ways are applied in such a manner as to maintain or achieve appropriate hoof-pastern axis. Pads and other devices are used by a number of breeds and exhibitors in a protective or beneficial manner and are in the best interest of the horse’s health and soundness.

USDA should not implement a complete prohibition of all pads and action devices for all breeds and disciplines. Furthermore, any consideration to prohibit the use of pads or actions devices should be based on sound science and considered only after a full, public rulemaking process. For these reasons, in response to the two questions noted above, the AHC feels that the use of pads and other devices should not be banned outright.

Conclusion

The AHC opposes any practice that might cause pain or distress to any horse under the HPA. The AHC does not condone any segment of the horse industry using action

devices or pads in a manner that is not in the best interest of the horse. Furthermore, the AHC opposes any use of any action devices or pads that may result in the infliction of pain or discomfort for the horse, but the AHC does not support an outright prohibition of all action devices or pads because, in many cases, the use of pads or devices may be beneficial. Moreover, an outright ban on action devices or pads could have unintended consequences for some breeds, shows, exhibitions, or exhibitors.

The AHC considers the safety, welfare, and what is in the best interest of the horse to be the paramount consideration in administering and implementing the HPA. The AHC encourages USDA to continue to incorporate transparency and collaboration in all HPA initiatives and urges the Agency to work cooperatively with stakeholders to ensure the horse industry thrives while also eliminating the act of soring.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James J. Hickey, Jr." The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

James J. Hickey, Jr.
President