

We wish to thank the USDA for giving Walking Horse owners and concerned citizens the opportunity to express our opinions about the ongoing struggle to eliminate the vile practice known as “soring.”

We are a club of Walking Horse enthusiasts with about 175 members in New York State. We have been in existence for 42 years, and most of our club members are trail riders who do not show. However, we have observed with outrage the actions of the “big lick” proponents, and we all suffer from the bad reputation of the sorers. Although, several decades ago, there were show venues in New York State which had padded Walking Horse classes, these were more akin to the Saddlebred presentations, and were a far cry from the present classes of many shows in Tennessee and neighboring states. Walking Horse classes in New York shows are now flat-shod only, with nothing heavier than a light-shod shoe.

We recognize that the TWH is unique in being covered by the Horse Protection Act of 1970, and deplore the continuing need for its enforcement, 40 years later.

- 1 We feel that very little progress has been made, until recently, in the successful implementation of that law to eliminate soring.**
- 2 We feel that “the Industry” has resisted and circumvented both the specific provisions and the intent of this law in many ways, including:**
 - o the soring itself;**
 - o the use of numbing agents while undergoing inspection;**
 - o the use of inspection bodies from within the industry (HIOs) which is only “the fox guarding the henhouse;”**
 - o outright intimidation of USDA inspectors; and**
 - o political threats to cut USDA funding if inspections are enforced.**
- 3 We feel that “self-regulation” has been a complete failure, and the only effective inspection and prosecution has been by the USDA.**

To the last point, there is a role for the HIOs in the show world, but it is NOT inspection for soring. The HIOs should enforce their own existing shoeing regulations and show rules.

Inspections should be conducted by USDA DQPs, or perhaps by a completely independent inspection agency, which is trained and supervised by the USDA. The inspectors should be equipped with all available current technology (such as Thermovision, the Sniffer, algometer, etc.), to minimize the potential for “stewardship” and numbing of the legs and feet prior to presentation for inspection, and, as much as possible, reduce the need for subjective judgment.

There are a number of actions which could be implemented immediately, and in the long term, to ensure compliance. For the short term (probably after enabling

regulations are created and passed):

- 1 APHIS and USDA inspectors should be the inspecting body at all shows (or at least at all shows above a certain size and prominence).**
- 2 We must provide adequate funding to USDA to pay for this work.**
- 3 Prosecute owners as well as trainers for HPA violations.**
- 4 Increase the penalties for convictions, to include greater financial penalties and jail time – for trainers and owners.**
- 5 Require free access to all areas on show grounds by inspectors, including stables, and legal ability to inspect for soring at any time.**
- 6 Consider video surveillance of all areas of show grounds, for soring activities.**

In the long term, reconcile the competitive aspect by **changing the judging standards to stop rewarding these exaggerated (and we think, ugly) gaits.** Remove the incentive to sore, by returning to natural gaits, not exaggerated caricatures of these wonderful, smooth gaits.

- 1 Eliminate all “action devices,” including the present stacks and chains, and tail sets.**
- 2 Make it a Federal crime to cut the muscles or tendons of a horse’s tail, and to use a tail set.**
- 3 Put a weight limit on shoes for all ages of horses – perhaps horse size/weight and breed appropriate. Do not allow certain dense materials, if that might put the shoe over weight limit.**
- 4 Limit the use of pads to that which is needed for therapeutic (medical) purposes, and establish a limit on thickness. Differentiate between a therapeutic pad and the “stack” used in the show ring.**

On March 13, 2012, the “Tennessean” published an editorial entitled, “Nothing justifies soring show horses.” They call it “an atrocity,” and conclude with this statement:

“The health and safety of the horses — and the humanity of the people they depend upon — are what matter. After 60 years, perhaps it’s time for the show-horse industry to re-evaluate their standard for what makes a horse a winner.”

We absolutely agree!