



Animal and Plant
Health Inspection
Service

Animal Care
4700 River Road
Riverdale, MD 20737

June 29, 2017

Dear Management of Horse Shows, Exhibitions, Sales, and Auctions (“Management”), Horse Industry Organizations and Associations (HIOs), and Owners, Trainers, Exhibitors, and Custodians of Horses Engaged in Horse Protection Act Covered Activities:

I hope this message finds you well and looking forward to the summer months ahead. Six months ago, I shared an [update](#) on refinements to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Horse Protection Act (HPA) program. Now, I would like to provide you with a progress report on our efforts to strengthen our HPA inspection program, our working relationship with you, and HPA enforcement.

At the outset, thank you for your support while I’ve settled into my position over the past 18 months. Through my interactions with you, I’ve come to appreciate that our relationship and ability to work together are critical to achieving the HPA’s dual purposes of ending soring and promoting fair competition. To fully achieve those purposes, I believe that horse owners, exhibitors, trainers, and custodians must present sound horses for inspection; USDA and HIOs must work together to enforce the HPA through consistent compliance inspections; managers must disqualify sore horses from participating in HPA-covered events; and, as Deputy Administrator, I must create an environment that promotes success in each of these areas.

Under the HPA, USDA and Designated Qualified Persons (DQPs) licensed by HIOs with USDA-certified programs share joint responsibility for detecting sore horses and assessing HPA compliance, deterring HPA noncompliance and promoting fair competition using consistent inspection techniques, and notifying management of any finding involving a sore horse. To support these shared responsibilities, in February 2017, USDA hosted joint training with DQPs and together we reviewed and discussed our [updated inspection guidance](#), participated in hands-on inspection exercises, and discussed performance expectations.

When USDA attends a HPA-covered event this year, we intend to conduct sample inspections from each type of class and observe DQP performance. In general, USDA will not select a horse for inspection if a DQP has inspected the horse and detected a specific type of noncompliance with the HPA, and when USDA finds the DQPs are performing inspections in full alignment with the procedures we practiced during our joint training. If we have concerns about DQP performance, we initiate communication with the DQP and HIO, conduct additional inspections as are necessary to assure compliance, and pursue [sanctions](#), as appropriate, involving a DQP’s lack of fitness to perform inspections and/or [alleged HPA violations on the part of owners, trainers, exhibitors and custodians](#). Although I’ve seen many positive signs in terms of USDA and DQPs working in greater alignment, neither you nor I should see any differences among USDA and DQP inspections or in the thoroughness of DQP inspections when USDA is not present at an event. I applaud the HIOs that have made refinements to their processes to achieve this standard, and strongly encourage all HIOs to adopt processes that fully align our [updated inspection guidance](#) to promote consistency throughout the entire industry.

With respect to the responsibility of horse owners, exhibitors, trainers, and custodians to present sound horses for inspection, we posted our updated [inspection guidance](#) on our website along with [videos](#) that depict our inspection process. I also visited with members

of the Walking Horse Trainers Association to review our inspection guidance, discuss their responsibility and unique positions to end soring, and respond to their questions. We took these steps to ensure everyone involved in the entry, exhibition, showing or sale of a horse has a clear understanding regarding the standards for compliance and will take all necessary steps to humanely train and present only sound horses for inspection, regardless of the event or who may be conducting inspections (if anyone) to assess HPA compliance.

Finally, USDA continues to build its relationship with managers who have the important responsibility of disqualifying sore horses from participating in HPA-covered events. We've increased our direct communication with managers to ensure they receive updates on USDA's [HPA Disqualification List](#), and attend a wide variety of HPA events to personally meet with managers to review [management's responsibilities](#), our [inspection process](#), and the [rights and responsibilities of exhibitors and transporters under the HPA](#). So far, we've attended 32 HPA events in 12 different states to observe DQP performance and inspect horses for HPA compliance. Nothing is more disappointing than having our USDA Veterinary Medical Officers arrive at a HPA event only to learn that exhibitors have elected not to participate, and I know managers feel the same disappointment after having invested resources into advertising, organizing, and hosting the event. A consistent and thorough inspection process coupled with management's commitment to fulfilling its responsibilities under the HPA are essential for ensuring exhibitors have clear expectations and can confidently present horses for inspection and participate in HPA-covered events.

Thank you for taking the time to read this update. We appreciate your support as we work to strengthen USDA's HPA program and our partnership with you. Please know we maintain open lines of communication at all times, and welcome your questions and feedback. We look forward to continuing to work with you toward achieving our common goals and a solid season of horse shows, exhibitions, sales, and auctions.

Very truly,

Bernadette Juarez
Deputy Administrator
Animal Care