APHIS Shares Update on 2025 Horse Show Season

Stakeholder Letter

To whom it may concern:

I hope this message finds you well. USDA's Horse Protection (HP) team is looking forward to working with you in the upcoming 2025 horse show season. I'd like to take this opportunity to provide you with important updates on the HP program.

First, as many of you know, USDA temporarily postponed the effective date of certain provisions of its final rule to amend the Horse Protection Act (HPA) regulations until April 2, 2025, and a federal court subsequently vacated several of those provisions, including the prohibition on all action devices, the banning of all substances, and the dermatologic conditions indicative of soring provision. Accordingly, at this time, there will be no regulatory changes between last show season and the upcoming show season. We are considering our next steps, including an additional postponement, and we expect to solicit additional stakeholder input.

Second, I'm pleased to announce that Dr. Emily Roberson will lead USDA's HP program for the 2025 horse show season. Dr. Roberson has extensive experience as a Veterinarian-in-Charge in USDA APHIS's Veterinary Services program directly interacting with stakeholders. Dr. Roberson will guide our efforts to build a productive relationship with the horse industry to achieve our shared goal of eliminating soring. As you may know, since December 2024, Dr. Louis DiVincenti has been acting as the Animal Welfare Operations Director for the APHIS Animal Care

program and will be assisting Dr. Roberson in these efforts.

USDA will implement or continue the following practices for the 2025 show season:

- USDA will exercise its enforcement discretion with regard to violations of the scar rule (9 CFR § 11.3(b)) as it did for the 2017 to 2023 show seasons. We will only cite a scar rule non-compliance based on non-uniformly thickened epithelial tissue on the posterior surfaces of the pastern when hair loss is also present. As a reminder, the scar rule generally requires the pasterns to be free of evidence of inflammation, including areas of non-uniformly thickened tissue. I encourage you to read the full scar rule regulation here.
- When a horse is disqualified for non-compliance with the Horse Protection Regulations, horse industry organizations (HIOs) are reminded this disqualification is for the entire event.
- When a USDA Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) inspects a horse and finds the horse unilaterally sore or finds an equipment non-compliance, the VMO may refer that horse to a Designated Qualified Person (DQP) for a second inspection. However, when a DQP inspects a horse and passes the horse as compliant, the VMO will not return the horse to a DQP for a re-inspection.
- USDA will alert HIOs to DQP performance concerns for follow-up. USDA also requires HIOs to enforce that only the horse, the rider, the groom, and the trainer are allowed in the warm-up area.
- As a reminder, all substances are prohibited on the extremities above the hoof of Tennessee Walking horses and racking horses except lubricants that are provided by event management and applied after the horse has been inspected. Fly spray, show sheen, and other similar substances may be applied to areas other than the extremities.
- USDA will continue using technologies such as on-site prohibited substance testing and digital radiography in addition to physical inspection procedures. We do not anticipate using ultrasound or thermography this season.
- We encourage all participants in HPA-covered events to review the prohibitions contained in the regulations here (9 CFR § 11.2).

We appreciate you taking the time to read this update. We look forward to working together for a successful 2025 season. If you have general questions regarding the Horse Protection program, please visit our website at https://www.aphis.usda.gov/hpa. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Dr. Emily Roberson at (405) 254-1804 or emily.a.roberson@usda.gov

and Dr. Louis DiVincenti at (585) 549-0570 or louis.divincenti@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Sarah Helming
Deputy Administrator, Animal Care
USDA-APHIS

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