

April 26, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The Horse Protection Act was enacted to eliminate soring and for the years since 1970, and the passing of the Act, USDA has had a very measured response with the focus on improvement. Under this process, significant changes have been made over time and the Tennessee Walking Horse has flourished up until about 2006.

Since 2006, the USDA has been consistently inconsistent and has disrupted the marketplace. As a result, values of horses have fallen dramatically depending on the discipline for that horse. Brood mares, owned mostly by small farmers, have little to negative value and that segment of our industry has been decimated. People who raise foals are mostly small breeders and farmers who depended on Tennessee Walking Horses for some added income. Many of those brood mare bands that have been deactivated or disbanded were accumulated over many many years and sleepless nights of studying matches that would improve the breed. With the repeated changes in enforcement and the resulting uncertainty, prices have fallen to all time lows and many have been economically forced to leave an endeavor that they had spent decades pursuing. Their exit reduces the knowledge base and the genetic pool to shambles and cannot be replaced for decades. Last year's production records have not been seen since 1959, falling from a high of 15,526 foals in 2001 to a low of just over 3,358 in 2011. We now predict those numbers will reach an all time low in 2014 depending on what USDA does in the coming months.

The economic engine of breeding is the show horse and the majority of foals produced are done so with an anticipation of those horses selling as show horse prospects. Most foals do not turn out to be show prospects. Unless a breeder can produce at least some higher priced horses for the show market, he cannot produce foals and stay in business. Even the breeder who produces exclusively for the pleasure market benefits from the pricing umbrella provided by the show horse prospects. If you eliminate that price protection his prices fall in the same proportion as the show horse market and thus he is eliminated. As a point of information, a large portion of the flat shod show and trail horses come from the padded horse breeding programs. Without the performance horse the TWH will virtually be eliminated. The flat shod horse and the padded horse have a symbiotic relationship; neither can exist without the other. Those who think otherwise do not have the experience of the undersigned.

The undersigned parties to this letter are past presidents of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association who have served this industry and shepherded the success and growth of this horse over a period of 40 years. We have spent many years

developing this horse and would not like to see it virtually disappear. We encourage the Secretary to be very careful in requiring any sudden change because this horse will not be able to change overnight, the process that was begun in the mid 2000s will be complete and you will not have a horse left to protect.

We, as a group, stand ready to assist the Secretary in an endeavor to secure the future of this horse should the Secretary so choose. We can be contacted through the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' Association at P O Box 286, Lewisburg, TN 37091.

TWHBEA Past Presidents

Signed under
separate cover
Jamie Etheredge
Jacksonville, Alabama
1975 - 76

Chas E Bobo
Charles E. Bobo
Shelbyville, Tennessee
1983 - 84

W. W. Harlin, Jr
W. W. Harlin, Jr
Nashville, Tennessee
1984 - 86, 92 - 93

Charles Gleghorn
Charles Gleghorn
Fayetteville, Tennessee
1989 - 91, 97 - 99

Walter D. Chism
Walter D. Chism
Arrington, Tennessee
1991 - 92

Jerrold Pedigo
Jerrold Pedigo
Murfreesboro, Tennessee
2004 - 07

Stephen B. Smith
Stephen B. Smith
Nashville, Tennessee
1995 - 97

Jim Welch
Jim Welch
McMinnville, Tennessee
2000-01

cc: other interested parties

Production Records

Each period starts 10/1, and ends 9/30:

	<u>Foals Registered</u>	<u>Individual Breeders</u>
2000-2001	15,526	9,306
2001-2002	15,435	9,147
2002-2003	14,929	8,795
2003-2004	14,727	8,409
2004-2005	13,482	7,682
2005-2006	12,119	6,839
2006-2007	10,055	5,619
2007-2008	7,309	4,181
2008-2009	5,561	3,094
2009-2010	4,314	2,391
2010-2011	3,358	1,870