



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

JUN 18 2012

Mr. Charles E. Bobo  
Ex-President  
Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders  
and Exhibitors Association  
Post Office Box 286  
Lewisburg, Tennessee 37091-0286

Dear Mr. Bobo:

Thank you for your letter of April 26, 2012, on behalf of former presidents of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association (TWHBEA), regarding the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) enforcement of the Horse Protection Act (HPA). I apologize for the delayed response.

I assure you and the members of TWHBEA that it is not USDA's intention to disrupt or negatively impact horse shows or otherwise affect the continued viability of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry. Rather, USDA has statutory responsibility for ensuring that the mandate of the HPA—the elimination of soring—is achieved. While I recognize that TWHBEA and other industry organizations have made significant progress toward achieving this goal, regrettably, the cruel and illegal practice of soring continues. As I am sure you agree, a Tennessee Walking Horse industry without soring can provide great opportunities for all segments of the industry.

The changes made to the program in recent years incorporate new tools, in addition to physical examinations, to make the inspection process more uniform and objective. USDA also continues taking measures to address problems identified in the September 2010 Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit on enforcement of the HPA. On June 7, 2012, APHIS published a final rule to address one of OIG's recommendations—requiring horse industry organizations to follow a standard penalty structure. Among other things, this final rule will help ensure a level playing field for all competitors and provide a deterrent effect for repeat offenders.

I understand that a number of TWHBEA members attended the listening sessions APHIS officials recently held across the country to gather information and opinions on the important issues confronting the HPA program. Dialogue with our stakeholders is important in carrying out HPA enforcement efforts, and partnerships with organizations like yours play a critical

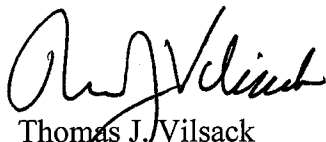
Mr. Charles E. Bobo

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role in USDA's efforts to aggressively pursue HPA enforcement to protect horses from soring. APHIS officials are currently reviewing the many comments received at the sessions, during which all participants agreed that they wanted what was best for the horse.

I assure you that USDA will endeavor to continue to enforce the HPA fairly and consistently, and that the views of all stakeholders will be considered as we move forward. If you would like to further discuss this issue, please contact Ms. Hallie Zimmers, APHIS' Stakeholder Liaison. Her telephone number is (202) 799-7029; her e-mail address is [hallie.zimmers@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:hallie.zimmers@aphis.usda.gov). Please share this response with the other individuals who cosigned the letter.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary