

THE FRONT PAGE

News & Views You Can Use

FDA Proposal: Death to Dead Stock Removal?

A Nov. 15 letter sent by Valley Proteins, Inc. to its customers has raised concerns that one of the most popular options for disposal of horse carcasses might soon become either prohibitively expensive or eliminated altogether.

For 50 years, the Winchester, Virginia rendering company has provided dead stock removal services to Maryland farmers – including those with horses. But the United States Food and Drug Administration has proposed a new rule regarding the use of dead stock in animal feed that could, in the company's words, "seriously jeopardize the continuation of this service."

It's all part of the FDA's attempts to further safeguard the country's animal feed supply against the agent believed

to cause bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or "Mad Cow" disease).

This infectious agent is believed to reside in certain "high risk" tissues, primarily the brains and spinal cords of uninspected cattle or cattle 30 months of age or older; the entire carcasses of uninspected cattle; tallow derived from the materials in question; or mechanically separated beef derived from these same materials.

Under the current rule – which is based on the FDA's 1997 feed regulation -- only ruminant feeds (those fed to cattle and sheep) must be free of these tissues. According to an FDA press release dated Oct. 4, "The removal of high-risk materials from all animal feed – including pet food – will protect against the transmission of the agent of BSE that could occur either through cross-contamination of ruminant feed with non-ruminant feed or feed ingredients during feed manufacture and trans-

port, or intentional or unintentional misfeeding of non-ruminant feed to ruminants on the farm."

In its letter, Valley Proteins argues that the proposed rule "will require Valley Proteins to substantially increase service charges or exit the dead stock removal business. Disposal alternatives will likely become fewer and more expensive in this era of stricter environmental controls.

"There is no scientific need for this new rule," the letter continues. "The current rule, established in 1997, is working – and the livestock industry's compliance is 99 percent. After more than 500,000 tests, only one animal raised in the U.S. has ever tested positive for BSE. That animal was born prior to the implementation of the current feed rule."

The company goes on to say in its suggested letter to FDA officials,

"The alternative disposal means, such as burying the animals, are also expensive and a potential

environmental disaster. We will see much tighter environmental regulations and fewer places to dispose of the material."

The proposed rule is reportedly in the "comment phase" right now, so Valley Proteins is urging its customers to send their comments to the FDA, as well as their senators and representatives.

Jane Seigler of Reddemeade Equestrian Center, a training, leasing and boarding facility in Silver Spring, has some thoughts on the subject. "The concern is that if [the rule's] implementation substantially increases the cost of dead stock removal services, or causes them to go out of this business altogether, as Valley alleges in its letter, there may be increased pressure on some farmers to sell aged or disabled horses at auction for slaughter, rather than having them humanely

ethanized at home (and removed by services such as Valley)," she says.

Readers interested in additional information on BSE and the FDA proposal can visit: www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/bse.html.

American Horse Council Updates

Right to Ride Bill

The Right-To-Ride Livestock on Federal Lands Act of 2005 has stalled in the Senate because of low support from the horse world.

The bill says, in part: "The Secretary of the Interior shall provide for the management of National Park System lands to preserve and facilitate the continued use and access of pack and saddle stock animals on such lands -- including wilderness areas, national monuments, and other specifically designated areas - - where there is a historical tradition of such use. As a general rule, all trails, routes and areas used by pack and saddle stock shall remain open and accessible for such use."

The American Horse Council, led by the American Quarter Horse Association, has launched a campaign to GET ANYONE WHO RIDES to send a pre-prepared letter of support. The easiest way to contact your senator or representative is to click on <http://capwiz.com/aqha/issues/alert/?alertid=7749306&type=CO>, which takes you to an AQHA Action Alert.

Zoonotic Disease Info

The American Horse Council has released a white paper entitled "NAIS and Horses: Why Horses Should be Included." The paper has been written in answer to a common question regarding why horses should be included in the National Animal Identification System, since "horses don't carry diseases that affect other livestock or that affect humans."

Most people don't realize that

horses do in fact contract diseases that can also be found in other livestock and, in some cases, in humans. The AHC paper lists and explains several of those diseases. The paper also describes some of the diseases that are experienced both by humans and horses, although in most cases, horses do not play a role in spreading these diseases to humans. (West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis are examples.) However, there are some infectious diseases that horses can contract that they can transmit to humans. Examples of such zoonotic diseases include rabies, salmonella, ringworm, leptospirosis, brucellosis, and anthrax.

Clearly, some equine diseases do have public health implications, and a severe outbreak of any of the diseases listed would have a substantial veterinary and economic impact. A quick response to such an outbreak will be critical to keeping the horse industry operating. It is for this reason that the horse industry is included in the National Animal Identification System. The full paper is available at www.horsecouncil.org.

Immigration Reform Hearing

The Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on Oct. 18 concerning comprehensive immigration reform. It focused on the debate started by President Bush last year with his proposals on handling illegal immigration. A key issue in this debate is whether to grant amnesty for illegal aliens who come forward and, if so, the ways in which they should be allowed to apply for permanent U.S. residency.

Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter (R-PA) regarded the issue of immigration reform as "a matter of very, very substantial urgency." Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff urged that "more than just brute enforcement,

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Should the proposed FDA rule be enacted, or not? Send your opinion to editor@equiery.com.

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we need a temporary worker program.”

This debate might continue in the upcoming months as members of the committee consider the introduction of another illegal immigration reform bill.

Equine Equity Act

Representatives Ron Lewis (R-KY), Hal Rogers (R-KY), Ed Whitfield (R-KY), Ben Chandler (R-KY) and Geoff Davis (R-KY) have introduced the Equine Equity Act in the House of Representative (H.R. 4151). The bill has been referred to the House Agriculture Committee and the Ways and Means Committee.

The bill is the companion measure to the Senate bill introduced in late July by Senators Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Jim Bunning (R-KY) and Blanche Lincoln (D-AR).

It would end the disparate treatment of the horse industry versus other businesses under the federal tax code and other federal provisions.

Specifically, the legislation would make horses eligible for capital gains treatment after 12 months, similar to other business assets; place all race horses in the three-year category for depreciation purposes; and make horses eligible for federal emergency assistance under circumstances presently enjoyed by other livestock and crop producers.

Slaughter Horse Legislation

Senator John Ensign (R-NV) has introduced the Virgie S. Arden American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (S. 1915) in the Senate to prohibit the slaughter of horses for human consumption. Co-sponsors include Senators Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Robert Byrd (D-WV), Arlen Specter (R-PA), Trent Lott (R-MS), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Carl Levin (D-MI) and Jim DeMint (R-SC). The bill has been referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

The legislation is a companion bill to the House bill (H.R. 503). Like the House measure, the bill would amend the Horse Protection Act (HPA), to prohibit “the shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchas-

ing, selling, or donation of any horse or other equines to be for slaughter for human consumption.” Such activities would be made a violation of the HPA and subject individuals to penalties of up to \$3,000 and/or one year in jail for the first offense and up to \$5,000 and/or two years in jail for a second offense. An offender may also be subject to civil penalties of \$2,000 for each violation.

The legislation also gives the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to detain any horse which the Secretary has “probable cause to believe is being shipped, transported, moved, delivered, received, possessed, purchased, sold, or donated in violation of” the prohibitions.

FHWA Horse Use Clarification

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has publicly clarified that “Equestrians and other non-motorized recreational use may be allowed on shared use paths and trails that use federal-aid transportation funds.” The notice, posted on the FHWA website, is a positive step forward in acknowledging equestrian activity on public land.

Under current federal law, equestrians are not specifically listed as potential users of shared-use transportation paths. Many riders believe that some land managers use this to deny equestrians access to these paths, even though that is not the intent of the federal law.

The AHC will continue to work with the FHWA and other federal agencies to promote long-term regulatory changes that will support equestrian use on federal land.

A copy of the FHWA notice can be found on the FHWA website at: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/allow_uses.htm.

Horse Park Hubbub

At press time, the Maryland Stadium Authority was still working on the feasibility study for a state Horse Park to be located in Gambrills, on an old dairy farm owned by the United States Navy Academy.

Muckraking

A small but voraciously vocal opposition group is aggressively using the local media to plant mis-

information in order to create (or increase) hysteria and stoke the fires of opposition. The anti-Horse Park group, which seems to be dominated by neighbors afraid of change and friends of the tenant farmers, has been effective at attracting the media to its meetings with sensational claims. For example, what better way to scare residents and get more ink in the local paper than to raise an alarm about a horse park creating an avalanche of manure, overwhelming not only this natural green space, but area residents, the quality of water, etc.

A tenacious group of local horsemen and women, led by Jan Hardesty, Steuart Pittman and Vicki O’Hara, patiently counter each new outrageous claim by the “antis.” Unfortunately, providing comparative calculations of current manure waste from the dairy operation -- which maintains 175 head of cattle -- with the manure waste that would be produced by proposed Horse Park uses does not make for riveting reading. (For those who are interested, the current operation produces approximately 3,800 tons of manure each year, which remains on the property and is spread as fertilizer over the crop part of the farm. If Horse Park usage was maximized at capacity for number of days, number of horses, and number of people, that manure waste output -- including that of the humans and the small 4-H dairy herd that would remain -- would be 2,464 tons of waste, most of which would be removed from the property. The bottom line, boys and girls, is that even at capacity, the Horse Park would produce less muck than the current operation, and have even less of an impact on water quality.)

Also figuring in the debate is the definition of agriculture. Horse Park opponents

claim that horses are not agriculture; of course, we say that not only are horses agriculture, they are critical to Maryland’s traditional agricultural infrastructure, providing markets for hay farmers, tractor supply companies, feed stores, etc. Without a federal or state definition

of agriculture that includes horses, Horse Park supporters can only use federal and state governments’ implicit inclusion of horses in their oversight of agriculture (for example, horses are included in USDA & MDA health regulations for livestock, and the MDA regulates riding stables and horse auctions, etc.).

Horse Park opponents are attempting to turn various groups of horse people against the project by making claims that the park’s plan does not include things like trails. However, these rumors are quickly being neutralized by such active online groups as the Maryland Horse Council Trails & Greenways yahoo.com discussion forum.

What Happens Next

After a lively hearing on Dec. 5, the Anne Arundel county council gave its blessing to the Horse Park concept. The Navy Academy will accept “re-use” bids for its dairy farm until Dec. 19, as required by law any time a federal government property is put up for lease by outside entities (the current tenant farmers’ lease expires at the end of 2007). Around the first of the year, the Maryland Stadium Authority will release the results of the feasibility study.

If the study does indeed indicate that a Horse Park is economically feasible at that site, legislation will move forward in the 2006 session for approval for funding.

Contrary to rumors propagated by locals opposing the Horse Park, the funding for its creation would not come from state tax dollars, but from the Stadium Authority’s own little pot of gold: profits from

Maryland’s various games of chance (Lottery, Mega-Millions, scratch-offs, etc.). And why shouldn’t profits from state-owned gambling go to

benefit the equestrian community? After all, those state-owned games have reduced the money gambled on horse racing, so it seems only fair that some of those lost funds be redirected back into the horse industry.

And the beat goes on.

The State Legislature will vote soon to approve the Maryland Horse Park! If you support the Horse Park, you need to let your legislator know! Visit www.equiey.com for info on legislators.