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News & Views You Can Use

MDA Investigates Possible Herpes

Multiple Locations Under Hold Orders

by Laurel Scott

The Maryland Department of Agriculture placed investigative "hold orders" on at least 15 locations Feb. 20-23 after a Maryland horse being treated at Leesburg, Virginia's Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center (EMC) tested positive for the equine herpesvirus (EHV-1). By the morning of Feb. 23, however, MDA officials said that no horses in Maryland had tested positive for the virus.

The hold orders were reportedly placed on locations in Howard, Baltimore, and Harford counties, as well as multiple facilities in St. Mary's, Montgomery, Carroll and Charles counties. Although additional locations were being evaluated at press time, the investigations centered on horses suspected of having indirect contact with the so-called "index" animal. The latter is a horse from St. Mary's County that was reportedly shipped to EMC on Feb. 7 for colic treatment but later developed neurological symptoms, was immediately isolated, and then tested positive for herpes. "The information we have is that the animal lived on the farm and had not traveled recently," said MDA communications director Sue duPont. At press time, the index horse remained at EMC, which was quarantined by the Virginia Department of Agriculture on Feb. 20 after two additional horses being treated there developed fevers and neurological symptoms.

The horses under MDA investigation had been hospitalized at EMC during the same time as the index horse but were discharged before that horse showed signs

of herpes. Test results on most of them were expected back by Feb. 26, according to state veterinarian Dr. Guy Hohenhaus.

At press time, the Virginia Department of Agriculture had reportedly placed at least two other Loudoun County locations and one Fauquier County location under quarantine. The Virginia state veterinarian had also reportedly ordered the cancellation of all area equine events (including the Casanova Hunt Point-to-Point) for the weekend of Feb. 24/25.

Restrictions & Precautions

As the MDA's duPont explained, a hold order "does the same thing as a quarantine: prevents the movement of horses on or off of the properties until they are lifted. We take this very seriously and our policy is NOT to wait for test results to place a hold order."

She went on to say, "Based on our animal health staff's visits and evaluations of the farms [and] horses... we feel this is a minimal risk situation." The reasons for this, she said, included the fact that the facilities under investigation were generally small, private farms with a "general lack of movement on and off the farms prior to the hold orders."

Still, the MDA advises horsemen unaffected by the hold orders to conduct business with a heightened sense of awareness. If preparing to move a horse, question the destination farm and shippers about the health of horses at their facilities or on their vehicles, MDA officials said. In addition, they advise farriers, feed truck operators and other service personnel to ask their clients whether they are under hold orders.

"Always report any signs of ill-

ness to a private veterinarian," duPont stressed. "With EHV-1, we are particularly interested in fevers over 103 degrees, unexplained respiratory disease, and any neurologic conditions."

Equine herpes is a highly contagious virus that can cause respiratory problems and abortions, but can also take a deadlier neurologic form. It is this form that caused the loss of six horses in Maryland last year; the virus has also struck Florida and Connecticut this winter.

For regular updates on the herpes situations in Maryland and Virginia, go to www.equinery.com and click on "News & Resources."

Legislative Update: Bills That Affect You

Racing, Slots on Back Burners?

by Nancy Hill

The Maryland General Assembly is in full swing, with few surprises. However, legislators have taken the lead on issues such as health care, tax "reform," early voting, electricity deregulation, smoking bans, death penalty abolishment, and "clean car" legislation. The Governor has signed on to the last two legislative initiatives but has taken the lead on few issues thus far. He *has* indicated his intention to help Maryland's long-suffering horse racing industry but has given no particulars.

On Jan. 25, representatives of Maryland's horse racing industry briefed the Senate finance committee on the present and future of the sport in this state. There was little surprise in the dim outlook. The main thrust of the briefing centered on the need for purse enhancements, increased marketing, and capital improvements to racetracks

– hence the need for the state of Maryland to provide the funding for these necessities. The industry estimates it will need approximately \$30 million per year for the next couple of years in order to be competitive with the surrounding states that currently have slots machines. Of the 10 East Coast states that have horse racing, seven have gaming. Other threats to horse racing include internet and telephone wagering as well as state-run lotteries that institute new, competitive games any time they wish.

The good news in Maryland is that Thoroughbred and Standardbred racing interests have finally been successful in working out their problems and now have a 15-year agreement in place. In addition, better relations now exist between management and horsemen.

Enough commentary. Now, on to specifics!

SB 8, Maryland Commission for the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve. This bill was introduced – and later withdrawn – by Sen. Garagiola. It would have fostered coordination with state agencies to further objectives and broaden the interest base of the Agricultural Reserve Program; worked with existing land preservation programs; incorporated Agricultural Reserve with capital design projects and land management programs; explored means for adding and protecting land; encouraged local government coordination; and established legal and administrative tools necessary to ensure local projects are reflected in state plans and programs.

SB 49/HB 69, Program Open Space – Attainment of Acquisition Goals – Increased Allocation for Local Government. As long

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as approved local land preservation and recreation plans have been met and acreage attainment is equal to or exceeds minimum goals under the Maryland Land Preservation and Recreational Plan, local governments would be allowed to use up to 100% (currently they can only use 75%) of their future annual apportionment for projects for five years, provided that up to 20% of the funds may be used for capital projects. Committees: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs; House Environmental Matters.

SB 188/HB 632, Harford County – Deer Hunting on Private Lands – Sundays. Several years ago, when Sunday hunting became law, a few counties decided they wanted to opt out. Each subsequent year, one or two of those counties have decided to opt in and allow Sunday hunting. This bill will more than likely pass with no opposition, since farmers and landowners are suffering crop losses resulting from deer overpopulation. Committees: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs; House Environmental Matters.

SB 230/HB 825, Admissions and Amusement Tax – Exemption for Activities Related to Agricultural Tourism. The current law only allows not-for-profit organizations to be exempt from this tax. This bill would provide that the admissions and amusement tax may not be imposed by a county on gross receipts derived from any admissions and amusement charge for *any* activities related to agricultural tourism. Committees: Senate Budget and Taxation; House Ways and Means.

SB 267/HB 110, Maryland Comparative Negligence Act. This perennial favorite of personal injury lawyers would allow recovery of damages for negligence that resulted in death, injury or property damage by a plaintiff, even if that plaintiff was contributorily negligent. Maryland's current "contributory negligence" law has really protected farm and stable owners from lawsuits by careless people who would otherwise sue. This is one that the horse community needs to defeat! Committees: Senate Judicial

Proceedings; House Judiciary.

SB 337, Registered Offenders Working at Fairs and Carnivals – Prohibition. Sen. David Brinkley has introduced this bill, which would prohibit fair and carnival owners, operators, and subcontractors from knowingly permitting registered offenders to work at fairs and carnivals. Hopefully, this bill would add another layer of protection for horse show participants and spectators (many of whom are children), since horse shows often occur in close proximity to these events. Committee: Senate Judicial Proceedings.

SB 341/HB 431, Creation of a State Debt – Montgomery County – Woodstock Equestrian Park would authorize a state debt not to exceed \$500,000, the proceeds to be used as a grant to the board of trustees of the Montgomery County Parks Foundation Inc. for the construction of a public equestrian park. Committees: Senate Budget and Taxation; House Appropriations.

SB 592/HB 790, Sales and Use Tax – Exemption for Sales by Religious and Nonprofit Organizations. This bill would expand the sales and use tax exemption to include *all* 501(c)(3) organizations as long as the proceeds of the sale are used to carry out the exempt purposes of the organization. Committees: Senate Budget and Taxation; House Ways and Means.

HB 348, Horse Racing – Purse and Bred Fund Supplements would require that certain lottery revenues be used to enhance horse racing purses and bred funds. As discussed above, this is part of the legislature's effort to help our horse racing industry. Committee: House Ways and Means.

HB 601, St. Mary's County – Deer Hunting on Private Property – Sundays would allow only bow hunting on private property in St. Mary's County on the last three Sundays in October, the second Sunday in November, and on the second Sunday of the deer firearms season. Committee: House Environmental Matters.

HB 701, Natural Resources – Preservation of Parkland. This bill would require the governor to increase funding to preserve state forests and parkland. Committee: House Environmental Matters.

SB 717, Somerset County, Wicomico County, and Worcester County – Deer Hunting on Private Lands – Sundays is another local bill that would remove these three counties from the list of counties that currently do not allow Sunday firearms deer hunting and would also allow bow hunting on private property the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November. Currently, Dorchester County allows this. Because this bill was introduced after the Senate deadline, it has been assigned to the Senate Rules Committee but will most likely be re-assigned to Education, Health and Environmental Affairs.

As far as Sunday deer hunting with firearms goes, the only counties that are still opting out are: Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford (unless SB 188 passes), Howard and Prince George's.

To date, several bills regarding the legalization of slot machines have been introduced; however, these are of little consequence, and it's doubtful whether any serious effort will be expended this year. Still, you never know ...

Nancy Hill is a lobbyist in Annapolis and has been a lifelong horse person.

Alternative Fuels, Higher Feed Prices

by Laurel Scott

If feed prices have you digging deeper in your pocket these days, America's booming ethanol industry is partially to blame.

On Jan. 24, President Bush called for stepped-up production of this clean burning, grain-based alcohol, a low-cost fuel additive made from crops such as corn, in order to cut the nation's gasoline consumption. A year ago, according to local feed

dealers, corn cost about \$2.50 a bushel, a price not especially favorable for growers. But with ethanol production now on a fast track, the demand for corn – as well as speculation on future supply and demand – had nearly doubled its price by press time.

Just ask Martin Adams, equine nutritionist and horse feed sales manager at Southern States Cooperative in Richmond, Virginia. "Diversion of corn into ethanol production has increased the price of corn for horse feeds and increased the prices of other feed ingredients," he said. "We are already about \$1 per bag over a 'normal' price on our horse feeds at this point in time."

At The Mill of Bel Air, owner Henry Holloway

reported that as of Feb. 14, the price of corn had increased \$68 a ton since the same time last year – and where corn goes, other grains are sure to follow. "What happens is, when corn goes up in price and reaches a given level, then other grains start to be used, rather than corn," he explained. "So when the other grains get used, the demand for corn as a feedstuff is reduced somewhat. However, the demand for the other grains increases, so their prices are reflected in that."

Holloway said that oats have increased \$62.50 a ton since last year, while barley has increased \$46 a ton and soybean meal \$50 a ton.

Of course, fluctuations in grain prices are nothing new. "We've seen this before," said Randy Martin, manager of Bowman's Feed & Pet in Westminster. "This is just a cycle that, a lot of times, [the market] runs through."

But as Holloway noted, this jump is somewhat unusual. Nor is it entirely due to the demand for alternative fuels. "There has also been a tremendous export demand for grain," he said. "And we also have large numbers of livestock. You've got to look at total demand."

Still, the market seems to be all about ethanol at the moment. Over

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at the Farmers Cooperative Association Inc., a Maryland certified grain dealer in Frederick, Specialty Sales Manager Richard A. O'Hara is watching the situation closely. "The ethanol plant situation is definitely a factor that is driving the speculators, but it is not the only factor," he confirmed. "They are speculating the volume of demand that the ethanol plants will create, and the possible effect it will have on the future value of the crop."

At press time, the National Corn Growers Association reported that there was no shortage of corn. However, as Holloway and others noted, that supply could be depleted rapidly if all of the ethanol plants that are projected to come on line actually do so. By the same token, if all of the plants do *not* come on line, and corn is not purchased at the projected volumes, grain prices could go down significantly.

There are other factors at play, as well. But the bottom line is this: "Are we going to see cheaper horse feed between now and the end of the year? I don't think so," Holloway said.

Slaughter Bills Return

On Jan. 17, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act was formally reintroduced into both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives.

H.R. 503/S. 311 would prohibit

the slaughter of American horses for human consumption. In addition, H.R. 249 would restore the protections for wild horses and burros that were removed by the passage of the 2005 Burns Amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act.

The slaughter-related bills were introduced in 2006, but Congress recessed for the year before either could be passed. The approval process now must begin anew.

The bills have 61 House original cosponsors and 11 Senate original cosponsors. Both bills clearly command majority support in both chambers of Congress, and nearly all of the leaders in Congress – House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), and Minority Whip Trent Lott (R-Miss.) – have favored the ban on horse slaughter.

USDA Webpage Has Disease Info

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Animal Health Surveillance System (NAHSS) is a network of federal and state government agencies integrated into a comprehensive and coordinated system of animal health monitoring and surveillance. The overall goal of the system is to collect, collate, and analyze animal

health information and to promptly distribute this information. The program is intended to improve the protection of national animal health and to increase the efficiency of existing animal health surveillance programs.

The NAHSS website contains information on all the major livestock groups, including an Equine Health Monitoring & Surveillance section. Two new web pages have been recently added to this section; they can be found at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/naahss/equine/>.

The first new web page is on equine herpesvirus. An outbreak of neurologic equine herpesvirus type 1 (EHV-1) occurred in late 2006 and involved a group of 15 horses shipped from Germany that were subsequently shipped to eight states. There was a significant impact on the horse industry because of this outbreak, especially in Florida. The new website gives

details and current information on this outbreak, as well as further information on the disease and links to state websites with EHV-1 information.

The second of the new pages is on equine viral arteritis (EVA). An outbreak of EVA occurred in Quarter Horses in 2006, with the virus confirmed on premises within six states (Kansas, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, and Alabama). This outbreak had a devastating impact on the Quarter Horse breeding industry. The new web page gives detailed information on this EVA outbreak, along with background information on the disease and on its management and control.

Along with the new pages on EVA and EHV-1, you can find information on vesicular stomatitis, equine infectious anemia, Eastern and Western equine encephalitis, West Nile virus and more. ■

CLARIFICATIONS

On pp. 41 and 52 of the February issue, Christine Cecil's pony Sliver was incorrectly listed under the name "Silver." According to Lyn Nelson, the pony was ridden by Emily Nelson on the MHSA circuit.

Also, on p. 49, Adult Eq. Ch. Courtney Somers and One Rhythm were incorrectly listed under the Green Spring Hounds Pony Club; they should have been listed under the Harford Horse Shows Association. In addition, *The Equiery* received incorrect information for some of the Harford Horse Shows Association awards. On p. 49, the Hunt Seat Child on Horse champion was Lauren Moran; there was no reserve champion in that division. The Hunt Seat Child on Pony champion was Caitlin Owings; there was no reserve champion in that division, either.