# USDA Horse Protection Program Update

09/08/2014

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) enforces the Horse Protection Act (HPA), a Federal law that prohibits horses subjected to a practice called soring from participating in shows, sales, exhibitions, or auctions.  Soring is a cruel and abusive practice used to accentuate a horse's gait and may be accomplished by irritating or blistering a horse's forelegs through the injection or application of chemicals or mechanical irritants. USDA takes the enforcement of this Act and its obligation to protect horses against this inhumane practice seriously.

To facilitate enforcement of the HPA, the Act allows horse show or sale managers to hire "designated qualified persons (DQPs)," who have been formally trained and licensed by USDA-certified horse industry organizations, to physically inspect Tennessee walking horses before they are shown.  APHIS attends approximately 10 percent of horse shows unannounced to serve as a second line of defense in detecting sored horses. APHIS oversees the DQPs' work and can cite violations when DQPs miss or do not cite the violations themselves.  APHIS utilizes multiple sophisticated tools during inspections, including thermography, iris identification, digital imaging, foreign substance swabbing, and blood testing, in addition to observation and palpation techniques, to support its enforcement of the HPA and identify sored horses.

The Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration, which USDA attends every year, is the premier Tennessee Walking Horse event and is held in Shelbyville, TN.  This year, the Celebration was held from August 20-30.

At the 2014 Celebration, APHIS and DQPs inspected 1,075 horses and found 219 violations of the Horse Protection Act.  These violations include: scar rule violations, foreign substance, unilateral soring, bilateral soring, high banding and illegal shoeing.

More information about the Celebration Results can be found [here](). The USDA Horse Protection Activity Report can be found [here]().