

July 13, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell:

The American Farm Bureau Federation supports the goals of S. 1161, the Horse Protection Amendments Act of 2015. This legislation aims to enact science-based reforms to eliminate intentional horse soring and allow for reasonable inspection oversight of the walking horse industry. While the incidence of soring occurs in less than two percent of horses inspected, it is an unacceptable practice that blemishes the image of responsible horse men and women and that right-minded horse owners do not condone. Your leadership on this issue is appreciated by our grassroots members.

Although deliberate horse soring was banned by the federal Horse Protection Act (HPA) decades ago, enforcement of the HPA relative to soring has been handicapped by inconsistent inspection standards and the lack of reliable, objective science-based techniques and tools to ensure uniformity across inspectors at walking horse industry events.

S. 1161 would include a clear definition of “objective inspection” centered on science-based methods reviewed by equine veterinarians to ensure reliable, reproducible results. In addition, the bill would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to create a single “Horse Industry Organization” (HIO) governed by appointed horse industry experts giving leadership to inspector licensing and development of testing and inspection procedures. This HIO would also establish a formal affiliation with each horse sale, exhibition, show or auction in coordination with the Secretary to conduct HPA inspections.

The HIO would be comprised of state agriculture officials and representatives of the Tennessee walking horse industry and subject to federal conflict of interest rules. In turn, the HIO would be directed to establish strict conflict of interest policies for any individual licensed by the HIO to conduct inspections.

Additionally, S. 1161 takes important steps to address concerns Farm Bureau has regarding other proposed horse soring legislation by:

- Focusing on objective, science-based inspection methods that can distinguish between legitimate training devices and techniques versus illegal soring methods;
- Providing for immediate disqualification of the sore horse and penalties to guilty parties; and
- Limiting additional taxpayer burden or increased budget at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Stallman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bob Stallman
President
American Farm Bureau Federation