

Retirement and Adoption Farms: A Step in the Right Direction

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The equine industry currently is without uniform structure or standards. This reality provides increased risks to the quality of life for horses placed under inappropriate care. The retirement and adoption facilities are to provide for the welfare of the horse and also serve as a refuge from mismanagement of funds, inadequate infrastructure and enterprising animal collectors. A certification program is needed throughout the equine industry. Adoption and retirement facilities are appropriate sites to initiate certification both by education of the principal caretakers and providing an ongoing program of accreditation of these facilities. Authors' addresses: Hagyard-Davidson-McGee, 4250 Iron Works Road, Lexington, KY 40511 (Byars, Slovis); Respite Farm, 1040 Hume-Bedford Road, Paris, KY 40361 (Cavey, Temple); and ReRun, Inc., PO Box 25, Millersburg, KY 40348 (Wylie). © 2004 AAEP.

The need to establish standards of care for equine retirement and adoption farms is related to the concern for the large population of unwanted horses. These unwanted horses are being absorbed into public programs or the private sector after loss of their primary usefulness. Traditionally, most former Thoroughbred racehorses that have no significant lingering musculoskeletal abnormalities have been absorbed by the hunter-jumper market, and former Standardbred racehorses have been used as cart horses. Realistically, horses with career-ending injuries lack a useful purpose, and they fall into the category of an unwanted horse in our society today.

The responsibility of equine veterinarians is to fulfill our commitment to the welfare of all horses, including humane euthanasia, whenever proper care or facilities cannot be provided for the horse.¹ Introduction of potential legislation to eliminate equine slaughter (Bills H.R. 857 and Senate 2352) has raised professional concerns regarding maintenance for the remaining unwanted horse population.²

Additionally, it creates problems in identifying an appropriate number of care facilities with adequate funding, educated management for such facilities, and medical staff to care for the horses. Well-meaning individuals can quickly get in "over their heads," and uneducated "animal collectors," uninformed zealots, emotional individuals, and entrepreneurs seeking financial opportunities may increase proportional to the increased population of horses needing to be accommodated on retirement and adoption farms. Humane organizations and industry professionals will need equine veterinarians to participate in assessing the quality of care that horses receive at newer and more specialized forms of retirement farms and facilities that function as alternatives to euthanasia by slaughter (Appendixes I and II).

The precise number of horses entering the "unwanted" category each year is not known. It is known that 50,000 horses each year are currently

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subjected to equine slaughter in the United States and that ~30,000 horses are sent each year to Canadian processing facilities. The number of unwanted horses may be much higher than known, because lifetime maintenance for horses is causing an increased environmental impact through land use, feed and water consumption, and waste disposal. There are conflicting accounts of the impact that California's ban on slaughter has had on the numbers of neglected horses; some believe that there has been an increase in the number of neglected and abused horses in that state.

Unwanted horses that are candidates for retirement and adoption farms may fall into one of two categories (i.e., temporarily not useful [wanted] or permanently not useful [unwanted]). The temporary category includes those horses capable of alternate careers in which a period of training or lifestyle adjustment is needed to make them adoptable or marketable for second careers. The Secretariat Center at the Kentucky Horse Park is a recently established program solely devoted to adoptable horses.³ A racehorse may become a police horse with considerable training or a hunter-jumper with little intervention before absorption by the performance-horse or pleasure-horse market. Horses that are pasture-sound and horses that cannot have humane quality of life regardless of ample feed and management both fall into the permanent non-usefulness (unwanted) category. This latter group of horses is affected by infirmities that warrant humane euthanasia. The precise number of horses that fall into each category is unknown but can be approximated by adding the number that are sent to domestic equine slaughter plants per year, the number that are exported for slaughter to Canada or Mexico, and the number that remain in conditions of unacceptable maintenance. The establishment of retirement farms is occurring at a favorable rate; however, funding for these farms remains an issue. Correctional facilities such as in Texas and Kentucky are state-shared programs for retirement and adoption. Some less-established facilities may generate initial funds with the heightened public awareness of equine retirement as an emotional issue; however, sustained funding may not be available. If funding is not sustained, overcrowding and financial shortcomings will occur in years to come, possibly causing inadequate care and neglect of the horses. There seems to be a wide range of "carrying capacities" for retirement and adoption farms, ranging from as few as 5-6 horses up to ≥ 100 horses. The Thoroughbred Adoption and Retirement Association (TARA), the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundations, Inc. (TRF), the Thoroughbred Charities of America (TCA), and the Blue Horse Charities, to name just a few, are current foundations that fund various retirement and adoption farms. The emphasis on the Thoroughbred is most visible based on the charitable donations by wealthy individuals involved in the Thoroughbred industry and the development of automatic funding programs at sales and racetracks. The foreign slaughter

of two notable Thoroughbreds, Exceller and Ferdinand, after dismal careers as breeding stallions has accentuated the emotions within the racing industry, as they have become more dedicated to responsibly supporting the lives of racehorses after racing and avoiding euthanasia. Blood-Horse Publications provides a website listing all current equine welfare and rescue organizations, <http://retirement.bloodhorse.com>.⁴ TARA has recently recognized the need to develop The Equine Adoption and Retirement Association (TEARA) to provide for all horses, not exclusively Thoroughbreds. In addition to these Thoroughbred-related programs, the American Horse Protection Association (Appendix III) also maintains a list of approved retirement and rescue farms that accommodate virtually any breed or type of unwanted horse. Sadly, despite the efforts of all of these equine welfare advocates, the need for placement opportunities for unwanted horses far exceeds the capacity of all these farms put together.

The veterinarian is pivotal in decisions regarding the humane living conditions and the well being of the horse. Factors that should concern veterinarians include overpopulation, overall body scores of resident horses, appropriate group separation of gender, nutrition, housing and safety of housing, communication access for emergencies, appropriate herd health maintenance and records, medical care, and caretaker knowledge. The need for a process of certification for retirement and adoption farms should be an additional future requirement to ensure that the welfare of the horse is maintained at all times. Currently, certification is required by TARA and includes a team with management, financial assessment, and veterinary expertise (Appendix I). TCA is similarly structured. Refinement of these programs is a dynamic process considered vital to avoid inhumane conditions for horses confined to inappropriate facilities and management.

The greater portions of the unwanted horse retirement and adoption initiatives are being provided by caring professionals from all walks of life. Challenges being presented by recognition of the unwanted horses include adequate numbers of financially sound retirement and adoption facilities, certification programs for such facilities, and humane but practical means of dealing with horses at life's end. Veterinarians dedicated to the horse as an animal unable to provide for itself are responsible for helping to meet these challenges. Education and cooperation are required in the future as the horse industry addresses the increased plight of unwanted horses.

References

1. American Association of Equine Practitioners. *American Association of Equine Practitioners' guidelines of humane euthanasia*. American Association of Equine Practitioners, 2004.
2. Sellnow, L. Horse slaughter. *Blood-Horse* 2004:1254-1255.
3. Shulman, L. Equine retirement homes. *Blood-Horse* 2004: 1244-1252.
4. Blood-Horse Publications. Thoroughbred welfare and rescue organizations. Available online at <http://retirement.bloodhorse.com>. 2

TARA STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Administration

1. An organization must be governed by a Board of Directors that meets a minimum of three times per year
2. An organization may apply for participation in TARA during or after its second year of operations subsequent to its receipt of tax exempt status by the IRS. By requiring an organization to be in its second year to apply, the organization would have been in existence as a non profit for one tax year and would have had an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to properly and punctually file legally required 990's on a regular basis, to demonstrate the care it gives its horses and the success of its adoption and retirement programs, to demonstrate its ability to operate in a professional and fiscally responsible manner, and to demonstrate means of support.
3. All organizations must demonstrate a history of timely filing of legally required documents such as 990's with the IRS, filing with State tax board if legally required and filing with their state agency that governs non-profits such as the Registry of Charitable Trusts in California. Failure to demonstrate such a history of compliance shall render an organization ineligible. Timely filing is defined as filing information when due.
4. Although a financial audit of an organization is not required in most circumstances, it is recommended that a CPA prepare a compilation of the organization's finances and that all financial statements and IRS Form 990's should be prepared by a CPA who is not on the Board of Directors of the organization in order to get an independent picture of an organization's financial health.
5. In cases where additional financial information is necessary for the TARA Accrediting Committee to make a decision, credit checks may be required to ensure the organization is in sound financial standing with their primary vendors such as feed suppliers, farrier, vet, and vanning companies. A reference from the organization's banker as to the state of their account(s) may also be required.

Operations

1. The organization must have its own property, either leased, owned, or have boarding contracts in place with qualified facilities on which to house the horses in its care. Personnel skilled in handling horses and capable of handling medical emergencies will observe and check horses twice daily.
2. The organization must have an adequate horse to permanent staff/volunteer ratio to allow for physical care-taking of the horses, cleanup and maintenance of the facility, and performing rehabilitation and retraining functions. A minimum of 1 full time staff member per 15 horses is suggested. The full time staff/volunteer members must be capable of handling the horses and handling medical emergencies (noticing a problem, calling a vet, performing first aid and controlling the horse until the vet arrives qualifies). Volunteer staff must be documented and shown to be reliable. (Ex. - Use of sign in sheets, timecards, etc.) Volunteer labor must be supervised, or could present a dangerous liability to both horse and volunteer.
3. All horses must be provided with shelter, fresh water, food of an adequate type, and regularly scheduled worming and foot care. Their physical accommodations should be such that they have room to move freely in clean, well maintained facilities and are never forced to stand in water due to lack of any dry surface.
4. Each horse in an organization's care must receive daily individual attention through handling, grooming, or exercising to ensure any potential problems are caught early, to ensure manageability in handling in the event of vet care or adoption, and to continue to foster the equine/human bond.
5. Feeding regimes are to be determined on individual basis to ensure proper nutrition for each horse's age and physical condition.
6. Using the vet check form, a required facility inspection by an American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) veterinarian who is not the facility's primary care giver, must be performed. The organization must also demonstrate that it has an ongoing relationship with a vet and farrier. To avoid penalizing the organization for poor physical condition of a horse that may have come to their care, the organization could present documentation to the vet regarding any horse which they have taken in within the last few months that is being rehabilitated.
7. All horses coming to an organization must be evaluated by qualified individuals as to their physical condition to help in planning their care and rehabilitation requirements. A legitimate effort must be made to determine their medical history. This can be done by communication with previous owners and previous vet.

Adoption Policies

1. No horse for which the organization does not legally hold title shall be adopted
2. Any registered Thoroughbred which is adopted out shall have its papers marked "Not to be used for racing" and a letter shall be sent to the Jockey Club advising that any duplicate papers it may issue should also be noted in this manner. If an owner who placed a filly or mare with an organization specified she is not to be bred, her papers must be marked that way and a

letter must be sent to the Jockey Club advising of this limitation. The papers must be surrendered to the new owners upon adoption, unless a SOLD WITHOUT PEDIGREE form has been filed with the Jockey Club and the foal papers surrendered for nullification.

3. Prior to completion of an adoption, the new owner must demonstrate their ability to completely handle that horse, provide proper care and to financially support it. A physical check of the horse's new home and, if a trainer is involved, a meeting with that trainer should be performed prior to the horse being placed.
4. All adoption agreements must contain a note that the horse may never be sold for slaughter.
5. Any horse placed must be physically and mentally capable of performing the function for which he is being adopted. For example, a horse with fractured sesamoids or severely bowed tendons could not be placed with someone seeking a hunter/jumper prospect. Every horse placed must have the physical/mental potential to perform the desired task. It is not in the horse's best interest to place him in a situation where he does not have the physical capability to succeed.
6. Any organization providing adoption services must be willing and prepared to take back any horse it had previously placed. This could be due to the horse not being properly cared for in its new home, or a change in the new owner's situation that now longer allows them to keep the horse.
7. If an organization offers a "trade in" option, a second horse shall not be placed with any individual who returned the first horse in condition that indicates less than adequate care and handling.
8. No accredited organization shall sell horses. Selling horses, as opposed to adopting them out, removed the ability to set limitation on use, creates a "for profit" operation, and raises questions of impropriety.
9. Full disclosure shall be made to all adopters regarding a horse's vices, medical condition and past or present injuries, other than those of a minor nature. Disclosure would include, but not be limited to, things such as cribbing, a tendency to colic, fractures, bowed tendons, laminitis, navicular, recurring lameness of undetermined cause, allergies and any necessary corrective shoeing.

Appendix II

TARA VET CHECK FOR ADOPTION & RETIREMENT SITES

Vets, please mark the following areas by number:

1. Inadequate 2. Adequate 3. Excellent

Denote specifics (type, etc. and any notes that will help us understand methods of the individual programs) on long lines. Continue comments on reverse if necessary.

Name and Physical Address of Farm _____

Name of Manager/Supervisor _____

Name of Program Farm is affiliated with _____

FEED PROGRAM

___ Hay _____

___ Feed _____

___ Supplements _____

___ Feed and hay storage (i.e. sheltered from weather, inaccessible to horses; properly stored) _____

WATER

Indoor water supply(s) ___ Buckets ___ Automatic waterers

Availability _____

___ Cleanliness _____

THE UNWANTED HORSE

Outdoor water supply(s) _____ Tanks _____ Automatic waterers
_____ Naturally occurring

_____ Outdoor Water Heaters (If yes, then type)

_____ Availability

_____ Cleanliness

Indoor/outdoor water source(s) (i.e. stream, pond, spring, cistern, municipal, etc.) Please list all)

PADDOCKS/TURN-OUTS

_____ Availability/size

_____ Division of horses

FENCING

_____ Type(s)

_____ Condition

BUILDINGS

_____ Living quarters for workers, if applicable

_____ Barns

_____ Stalls

_____ Size(s) of stalls

_____ Fire Extinguishers/Hydrants (Locations)

_____ Emergency Numbers Posted in Accessible Location

_____ Run-in sheds

HORSES

_____ Overall health and appearance: (please explain circumstances of any horses in poor condition)

MEDICAL / HEALTH PRACTICES

_____ Vaccination program/policies

_____ Worming program/policies

_____ Equine dentist(s): Please give name and phone number

_____ Record keeping

_____ Medical supplies

_____ Vet availability

_____ Injury protocol

_____ Euthanasia Protocol (Use separate sheet if needed)

FARRIER

_____ Frequency

_____ Quality

HORSE TRANSPORTATION IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

_____ On-Site Yes _____ No _____ Van _____ Truck and trailer _____

TACK (If applicable)

_____ Condition

ENVIRONMENT

_____ Safety

_____ Cleanliness

_____ Bedding

_____ Manure removal

_____ Fly control methods

Veterinarian, please give overall impressions of this program/facility:

Signature: _____

Date _____

Contact phone number: _____