



National Equine Health Plan

Background

The horse community is just one step from a calamity and that calamity is a disease outbreak of such proportion as to widely imperil the health of our horses and threaten the economic viability of our industry. The ever-present risk is due to the equine industry's reliance on the timely movement of healthy horses for sales, breeding, racing, showing, work and recreation. In this environment, an infectious disease outbreak can result in federal or state restrictions on horse movement to stop the spread of the disease.

Since the beginning of 2013 there have been outbreaks of the neurologic form of Equine Herpesvirus-1, called Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy (EHM), in New Jersey, Utah, Colorado, Florida, Illinois Tennessee, California and Quebec, Canada. These and other disease outbreaks have cost the industry millions of dollars for the care of horses, implementation of biosecurity, and lost revenue in the form of cancelled or restricted commercial equine activities.

Status of Formation of Health Plan

One of the best ways to contain any disease outbreak is to provide accurate and timely information about the current status of the problem and how to break the cycle of disease transmission. Even though modern communication systems allow access to information continuously, it is often plagued with inaccurate information or too little accurate information. This leaves horse organizations, owners, events, veterinarians and health officials susceptible to the same misinformation generated about the affected horses and wondering about the risk of infection to currently healthy horses.

The American Horse Council, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, and the National and State Animal Health officials are in the process of creating a National Equine Health Plan (NEHP or National Plan) that will outline the issues surrounding the prevention, diagnosis and control of diseases and the responsibilities and roles of the industry, federal and state authorities. Fundamental to such a plan is an Equine Disease Communication Center (EDCC) to help coordinate and disseminate accurate information about equine diseases throughout North America. Plans are underway to create a network involving practicing veterinarians and Federal and State Animal health officials to relay time-sensitive information through a central communication system so reliable and updated information will be available to all segments of the horse industry in real time.

Industry organizations, state animal health officials, and USDA are involved in the preparation of a National Plan and the formation of an EDCC. While Federal and State Veterinary Regulatory officials' help is critical and already being formulated, without industry support and input this program will never achieve the goals of an effective

National Plan and communications system which can help stop the spread of disease that can kill horses and cripple the industry.

The NEHP will help educate the industry about the broad hazards of equine diseases and how to prepare for outbreaks and efficiently respond to an outbreak. In the long run, the benefits of this effort are less about a specific disease and more about establishing a proactive process to address, respond to, and mitigate disease effects in order to protect the welfare of U.S horses and the economic viability of the industry.

The NEHP will create a roadmap for individuals, associations, events and authorities to work together to enhance industry outreach and education in order to explain the importance and hazards of a disease outbreak.

The NEHP's bio-security plan will draw mainly on what Dr. Katie Flynn of the California Department of Food and Agriculture published in her *Bio-Security Tool Kit*. The Tool-Kit provides ways to limit the spread of infectious diseases at a show, facility or event. There are step-by-step instructions on how to establish good bio-security habits and establish better bio-security practices for event organizers.

Equine Disease Communication Center

The NEHP Task Force, comprised of representatives from AAEP, AHC, State Animal Health Officials and USDA-APHIS met at the 2013 AAEP Convention and discussed the final steps for implementation of the EDCC. The website is fully operational at this time. The call center and website will operate out of the United States Equestrian Federation headquarters in Lexington, Kentucky.

As mentioned earlier, the EDCC will help to coordinate and disseminate accurate information about equine disease outbreaks throughout the nation. The EDCC will also serve as an educational tool for horse owners when they need information on specific diseases or what bio-security procedures can be taken to help prevent an outbreak.

The United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) has graciously donated space for the EDCC at their headquarters in Lexington, Kentucky.

An EDCC Fundraising Task Force has been established to solicit pledges from industry organizations and individuals totaling \$100,000. This figure represents the annual operating budget for the EDCC. The AAEP Foundation is being used as a depository for the donations.

AHC Position

The AHC supports the continued development and collaboration between state, federal, and industry representatives in implementing the NEHP. The AHC believes the NEHP is

essential to protecting the health and welfare of the U.S. horse population and the economic viability of the horse industry.

