



May 15, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250-1300

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The American Horse Council (AHC) is greatly concerned over the ongoing occurrence of Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM) in the United States. CEM is a foreign animal disease. As such, it is our expectation that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and various states have been undertaking the necessary investigations to determine the extent of the occurrence, original source of the infection and identify high risk stallions and mares. Furthermore, we would hope that the necessary funds and resources are being made available to eradicate the disease in a swift and thorough manner.

As you are aware, the disease outbreak began in December 2008 when a stallion in Kentucky was diagnosed with CEM. Since the initial finding a full investigation has been underway, which at this point has lasted for approximately five months and which does not appear to be near completion. The AHC has major concerns over the implementation of this investigation, the economic impact this outbreak has had on the horse industry, and the actions that are needed to make sure that CEM is fully eradicated at which point the country can return to its previous CEM free status.

The AHC is the national association representing all segments of the horse industry in Washington, D.C. The AHC includes over 160 organizations representing every facet of the horse world – from owners, breeders, trainers, veterinarians, farriers, breed registries and horsemen's associations to horse shows, racetracks, rodeos, commercial suppliers and state horse councils.

With an estimated total of 9.2 million horses, the U.S. horse industry is a \$102 billion industry that supports 1.4 million full-time jobs. There are 4.6 million Americans involved in the industry as horse owners, service providers, employees and volunteers. The breeding sector is a significant part of the horse industry, involving over 1.1 million horses, with a \$12 billion total impact, and supporting 193,000 jobs.

The five states that have the largest number of horses in the U.S. are all involved in this CEM outbreak investigation; these include Texas (979,000 horses), California (698,000 horses), Florida (500,000 horses), Oklahoma (326,000) horses, and Kentucky (320,000

horses). In Kentucky, a state that has been seriously affected by this outbreak, the horse industry produces goods and services valued at \$2.3 billion, and provides a total of approximately 96,000 jobs. A CEM outbreak in 1978 among Kentucky's Thoroughbred population shut down the breeding sheds for several weeks. The cost to the industry as a result of the outbreak was estimated at \$1 million a day.

Clearly, the horse industry and more specifically the breeding sector have a significant impact on the nation's economy. With the current CEM outbreak, additional burdens are being placed on horse owners, who are already having to deal with the national economic hardships, and now have to incur additional significant costs related to quarantines, testing and treatment for any horse that is deemed "exposed" to the CEM causative organism. At this point, over 800 horses have been involved in this investigation located in 48 states with more positive and exposed horses added every week.

While the industry appreciates USDA's funding for the diagnostic testing involved and the general support throughout the investigation so far, much more is needed to assist the industry in bringing this investigation to a satisfactory conclusion and in quickly eradicating the disease and returning the U.S. to a CEM free status. A more aggressive approach is needed to expedite the identification, tracing and testing of any exposed horses, to find the origin of the disease and to eradicate it from the U.S. Additional funds and resources are necessary to relieve the burdens on the horse industry as well as state governments. We also urge members of your staff to continue the important dialogue and negotiations with our international trading partners to limit any additional movement restrictions, which would be disastrous for the U.S. horse industry which sells horses around the world.

Though CEM is a treatable disease, it is very costly to trace, quarantine, test and treat affected animals. We want to make sure that this occurrence of the disease is effectively investigated and ultimately, eradicated. In view of the significant financial burden being placed on horse owners, we want to ensure their continued cooperation with the current investigation of this disease. This is critical for the country if it is to return to CEM free status. The alternative is the risk of the disease becoming established and endemic in the U.S. Such an outcome would have an extremely negative financial impact on the horse industry and international trade in horses and equine germplasm.

Thank you for your prompt attention and response to this very important issue. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



James J. Hickey, Jr.
President

cc: Dr. John Clifford, USDA – APHIS – VS Deputy Administrator