



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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OPINION

NEW HORSE PROTECTION ACT RULE: MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

An Editorial by Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller
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The Biden Administration's new Horse Protection Act (HPA) rule might sound like a good idea on paper, but let me tell you—it's a disaster in practice. This rule isn't about protecting horses; it's about federal bureaucrats grabbing more control over an industry they clearly don't understand. The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) new rule is so absurd that it makes using fly spray on a horse a potential violation. That's not a joke—they can't be serious!

The HPA was enacted in 1970 with good intentions—to regulate the Tennessee Walking Horse industry and to outlaw the showing, sale, auction, exhibition, or transport of sored horses. Soring is the intentional infliction of pain on a horse's legs or hooves using chemicals, devices, or other harmful methods to force an exaggerated, high-stepping gait. This is common in competitive show circuits for breeds like Tennessee Walking Horses and racking horses.

Due to my heavy involvement in the equine industry, I know firsthand the importance of protecting this sector and these animals. But we've got to do it with practical, enforceable regulations. The new HPA rule will devastate the equine community, especially breeders, trainers, and horse owners in Texas and nationwide.

Anyone who's ever owned a horse—whether for work, hobby, or show—knows we treat these animals better than most folks treat their favorite family members. For Texans, horses are more than just animals. They're part of our families, our livelihoods, and a driving force of our economy.

If the HPA rule change is implemented, horse owners will have many headaches. The rules would ban anything that might cause irritation. Even a minor rub from a bell boot or sore muscles from training could be labeled as intentional soring. Before long, every 4-H horse event, barrel race, cutting, rodeo, horse show, trail ride, reining event, and team penning could face burdensome regulations.

Event organizers would have to provide advance notice and hire USDA-approved veterinarians or vet techs to inspect every horse and reinspect the class winner. Even something as simple as applying show sheen to a horse's coat could result in disqualification.

This new rule doesn't just target owners—they drag in haulers, trainers, vendors, and sponsors, making everyone liable. Horses would need to be blemish-free, undergo invasive inspections, and face strict shipping regulations. Even basic therapeutic treatments would require a vet's oversight, and winners in the ring would face mandatory reinspection. It's government overreach at its worst, and this isn't even the complete list of what they're pushing.

Soring is an issue that is largely specific to the state of Tennessee, so I question why the national equine industry must suffer under smothering regulations that overrule what should be dealt with at the state level. I'll tell you. They are trying to rewrite the rules to expand the definition of "soring" so broadly that it could rope in nearly the entire horse industry. Animal rights extremists just won't quit. The new HPA rule is a direct result of their meddling. Believe it or not, the USDA's lead veterinarian, Dr. Aaron Rhyner, had the gall to suggest that even the simple act of riding a horse could somehow be considered "soring."

The USDA's new rule forcing the equine industry to hire, train, and implement inspectors—that we have to pay for—at every event classified as a horse show is impossible. They don't have the funding or resources. They also promise to hire qualified industry-experienced veterinarians, which we know is a role that is currently seeing staffing shortages already. What will they be forced to do instead? Send inspectors—most of whom lack fundamental knowledge about horses or rural life—to tell us how to care for our animals? Give me a break!

Here's the bigger picture: This government overreach won't stop with horses. If we don't push back now, what's next? Farmers, ranchers, and eventually, pet owners will all be in the USDA's crosshairs. Today, it's the equine industry. It could be your cattle, pets, or way of life tomorrow.

The bottom line is that these new rules won't protect horses. They'll devastate the equine industry, punish responsible horse owners, and destroy rural communities across the nation. Instead of promoting animal welfare, the USDA imposes senseless regulations that will do more harm than good.

It's time to rein in these runaway bureaucrats and restore some common sense to Washington, D.C. It is my hope that the incoming Trump Administration will withdraw this new rule.