

Equine Veterinarians' Consensus Report On the Care of Horses on PMU Ranches

Arthur B. King, DVM¹

Nat T. Messer, IV, DVM²

Colin A. Roberts, BVSc, PhD³

¹ Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
339 Booth Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7K1
Canada

² American Association of Equine Practitioners
4075 Iron Works Pike
Lexington, KY 40511
USA

³ International League for the Protection of Horses
Anne Colvin House
Snetterton, Norwich, Norfolk NR 16 2LR
United Kingdom

¹ Dr. King is District Veterinarian for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada and the President of the Ontario Equestrian Federation. He is the official representative of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association for this report.

² Dr. Messer is Associate Professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, USA and Chairman of the Equine Welfare Committee, American Association of Equine Practitioners. He is the official representative of the American Association of Equine Practitioners for this report.

³ Dr. Roberts is Senior Scientist, Centre for Equine Studies at the U.K. Animal Health Trust, Newmarket, Suffolk, United Kingdom and the Senior Veterinary Advisor to the International League for the Protection of Horses. He is the official representative of the International League for the Protection of Horses for this report.

Equine Veterinarians' Consensus Report on the Care of Horses on PMU Ranches

Three equine veterinarians representing the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), and the International League for the Protection of Horses (ILPH) visited pregnant mares' urine (PMU) ranches representing a broad spectrum of the industry.

The purpose of the visits was to observe the health and welfare of the horses involved in the production of Premarin, an estrogen replacement medication derived from PMU, and to confirm Wyeth-Ayerst's field application of the Continuous Improvement Process. The team included Arthur B. King, DVM, for CVMA, Nat T. Messer IV, DVM, for AAEP, and Colin A. Roberts, BVSc, PhD, for the ILPH. Following is our consensus report.

Overall Perspective on PMU Ranching

- The use of PMU horses to produce a commodity for the benefit of mankind is responsible and justified, as long as the horses receive the type of humane care observed on these farms.
- There is evidence that Wyeth-Ayerst and the PMU producers are concerned with maintaining and improving the care, health and welfare of horses on PMU ranches. The ranchers showed a pride in their animals and a concern for their well being. The facilities and management are good. Horses observed were bright, alert, and apparently free of significant vices or stereotypic behaviors.
- There has been progress as a result of the 1995 inspection by 12 inspectors with the Canadian Farm Animal Care Trust. Their recommendations have either been implemented, such as enhanced field inspections and veterinary care, or are being investigated in well-designed studies.
- Notwithstanding the progress that has been made since the 1995 inspection, two areas of management, water and exercise, should continue to be given priority to evaluate to what extent modifications to existing practices may be appropriate.
- PMU mares receive quality feed and water, and in many respects the care is comparable to that given horses, or for that matter any livestock, used for other purposes in North America.
- Compliance with the recommended Code of Practice, a self-imposed, self-regulated set of guidelines established several years ago and recently updated, was generally good. Where minor differences from the Code were noted by the inspection team on a few farms, at no time did they appear to adversely affect the health and welfare of the mares. The quality of management compensated for these differences.

Commentary on the Continuous Improvement Process

- Wyeth-Ayerst's Continuous Improvement Process addresses the unique management needs concerning urine collection. The field inspection, trailer inspection, veterinary health review and reporting procedures, barn improvement program and the appointment of two advisory groups are all evidence of the company's dedication and commitment.
- The Linwood Equine Ranch, established by the company, provides the opportunity for research that would benefit the horse world in general as well as PMU mares in particular.

Suggested Science-based Research Initiatives As Part of the Continuous Improvement Process

- Determine optimal exercise requirements for stabled horses, particularly any associated impact on the lower limbs.
- Investigate materials and designs used in the construction of stalls and floors, particularly to minimize lower limb edema and injury.
- Determine optimal frequency for watering and whether constant watering provides any physiological and psychological benefit or leads to significant husbandry disadvantages.
- Investigate options for free-movement collection system.
- Investigate factors that might affect estrogen production such as breed and nutrition.
- Determine need for, and range of grooming requirements.

Suggested Administrative and Education Initiatives

- Continue to review the Code of Practice standards regarding care and management of horses as new information is obtained from ongoing research.
- Work to assure consistent level of detail in independent veterinary reporting through increased liaison with veterinarians and education concerning veterinary care standards for PMU industry.
- Review standards for, and conditions of, turn-out areas.
- Consider changes to the payment process for the Independent Veterinary Review Program.
- Initiate program for rotation of field inspectors to cover farms in different areas.
- Develop continuing education on equine health for all farm personnel through creation of workshops, audio-visual and education materials and sharing of “best practices” related to equine and PMU management.

Conclusion

The ranchers took pride in their animals, and Wyeth-Ayerst showed a commitment to continuing to improve the standards of equine welfare on the farms. Based on our inspections, the allegations of inhumane treatment of horses involved in PMU ranching are unfounded. Generally, the horses are very well-cared for. The ranchers and the company have responded in a progressive and proactive manner to both professional and public interest. Observations for improvement have been taken seriously and continue to be acted upon by Wyeth-Ayerst and the PMU ranchers. The public should be assured that the care and welfare of the horses involved in the production of an estrogen replacement medication is good, and is closely monitored.

Nat Messer, IV, DVM, Chairman,
AAEP Equine Welfare Committee

Arthur B. King, DVM, President,
Ontario Equestrian Federation

Colin A. Roberts, BVSc, PhD
Sr. Veterinary Advisor, ILPH

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) and the International League for the Protection of Horses (ILPH), internationally recognized equine welfare organizations, were asked by Wyeth-Ayerst to each designate an equine veterinary expert to visit PMU farms to review the health and welfare of the horses and to observe the continuous improvement efforts undertaken by the company and the ranchers.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners, headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky, was founded in 1954 as a non-profit organization dedicated to the health and welfare of the horse. Currently, AAEP, represented by more than 5,800 members worldwide, is actively involved in ethics issues, practice management, research and continuing education in the equine veterinary profession and horse industry.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, the national body representing and serving the interests of veterinary professionals in Canada, is committed to excellence within the profession and to the health and well-being of animals. It promotes public awareness of the contribution of animals and veterinarians to society. Current CVMA priorities include leadership on national issues, animal welfare advocacy and promotion of the public profile of the profession.

The International League for the Protection of Horses located in the United Kingdom, is an internationally recognized organization committed to the welfare of horses throughout the world. The ILPH also focuses on the need for progress in veterinary medicine and applied research to enhance equine welfare. Founded in the United Kingdom more than seventy years ago, ILPH now has a membership of more than 60,000 and is active in more than 20 countries.