

THE FRONT PAGE

News & Views You Can Use

State to Consider Quarantine Facility

On July 14, the Maryland Department of Agriculture received a \$42,500 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to conduct a feasibility study for an animal quarantine facility in proximity to Baltimore-Washington Thurgood Marshall Airport. Such a facility would improve the business climate for international shipments of livestock to and from the mid-Atlantic Region.

"With the nearest quarantine facilities for the export of horses and livestock in New York and Florida, international trade of these animals is inconvenient and represents lost economic opportunity for Maryland farmers and agricultural businesses," said Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.

"This grant will allow us to see if opening a quarantine facility convenient to BWI is practical and advantageous for those doing business in the mid-Atlantic Region."

In his announcement of his agency's Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program grants to 25 states, U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner said, "These grants will be used to explore new and innovative approaches to marketing U.S. food and agricultural products and to improve the efficiency and performance of our marketing system."

The purpose of the feasibility study is to determine if the market will support both the

existing quarantine facility in Newburgh, New York and a new facility in the Mid-Atlantic region. The Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development and the Maryland Department of Agriculture are partners in the project.

Industry support is certainly there. Cricket Goodall, executive director of the Maryland Horse Breeders Association, seconded the notion that a Maryland facility would likely reduce expenses and expand trade in the horse business.

Officials at Fasig-Tipton, which stages five horses auctions here each year, have also gone on record in favor of the idea. A site close to the airport – like the old trucking yard reportedly under consideration – would help cut transportation costs and attract more consignors, they noted. A quarantine facility would also be an incentive for Fasig-Tipton to stay in Maryland at a time when the company is looking for a bigger auction facility.

Animal Emergency Program Established

The State Animal Response Teams (SART) recently announced the launch of the Maryland State Animal Response Team (MD SART). The training and certification process was partially funded through a \$20,000 development grant from PetSmart Charities and administered through SART.

Founded in 1999, State Animal Response Teams (SART)

is a collaboration of interagency state organizations and private animal interests dedicated to ensuring animal welfare during disasters. The SART model utilizes the principles of the Incident Command System (ICS) to train participants to facilitate a safe, environmentally sound and efficient response to animal emergencies on the local, county, state and federal level.

A stakeholder conference and training session was attended by 115 individuals and conducted by North Carolina SART (NC-SART) on Aug. 16-17 in Linthicum Heights. Participating stakeholders included representatives from such agencies and organizations as the Federal and State of Maryland Departments of Agriculture, Maryland Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association, County Animal Control Agencies represented by Professional Animal Workers' Society, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, the Center for Agrosecurity and Emergency Management at the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams, the Virginia Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, the Essex Community College Veterinary Technicians Program, and various non-profit humane organizations.

With help from Dr. Jacob Casper, coordinator of disaster services for the Maryland Department of Agriculture, the stakeholders successfully completed a two-day training session and a review of Maryland's existing animal disaster plan.

The participants then began development of a resource typing document, a database of potential volunteers and supplies for the new organization.

An executive committee board of directors for the incorporated 501c3 SART was formed, and with the assistance of NCSART, development of the new organization was completed. "Participation of Maryland's SART volunteers will greatly enhance the capability of the Maryland Department of Agriculture to respond to any animal issue during a disaster," said Maryland State Veterinarian Guy Hohenhaus.

After completion of planning and training, Maryland will join current SARTs in North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Maine, Illinois, Kansas, Colorado and Mississippi. Louisiana, Texas, Kentucky, Michigan and Virginia are in the process of developing SARTs.

Horse Park Wins Big in Primaries

by *Steuart Pittman*
Anne Arundel Horse Council

The Anne Arundel Horse Council celebrated the landslide victory of George Johnson IV in the Sept. 12 Democratic primary over Dennis Callahan for county executive. Johnson spent a 14-hour day with the horse activists last month visiting the Virginia Horse Center, and he came away enthusiastic about prospects for a horse park in Anne Arundel County.

Dennis Callahan, however,

continued

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made the fatal mistake of publicizing his opposition to the Horse Park in his campaign materials and in public appearances. The result was a staggering loss. Callahan got 38.5% of the vote, compared to 61.5% for Johnson. The county executive race is critical to the future of the Horse Park at the Navy Dairy Farm in Gambrills. Current County Executive Janet Owens surprised elected officials from other Maryland counties when she refused to support putting this lucrative facility in her county. Her position makes sense when you consider that her most generous campaign contributors have proposed mining gravel where the Horse Park's cross-country course would be built.

The next county executive will either shepherd the Horse Park in or block it. The Anne Arundel Horse Council met or communicated with all of the candidates from both parties. The Johnson win on the Democratic side was critical, since there are more registered Democrats than Republicans in the county. On the Republican side, the voters elected John Leopold.

Leopold supports agricultural preservation and maintenance of open space, so he should support the Horse Park. To date, however, he has not been willing to take a position or even meet with anyone to get the facts. The horse council and its allies will attempt to meet with Leopold again, now that he is the Republican nominee.

We are also working to make sure that our delegates and state senate candidates support the Horse Park, and we need to do this statewide. Call the campaign offices and ask about their positions. Let them know that horse people vote. Educate them. Join the Maryland Horse Council and get involved in the campaign for the Horse Park. If you aren't familiar with the details, go to www.md-horsepark.com or www.anne-arundelhorses.org.

PGEC Project Funded

The Prince George's Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro recently received \$1 million for a new covered arena (auxiliary ring) from Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission funds.

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According to PGEC Equestrian Event Manager Elizabeth Yewell, the plan is to cover one of the existing shows rings.

"This project will truly enhance the facility and will be utilized by our equestrian clientele," she said. "Historically, the Prince George's Equestrian Center has on occasion hosted most than one equestrian event on the facility grounds and this certainly is possible when the covered ring is complete. Plans are also in the works to offer an additional schooling area on the infield."

Dorothy Troutman deserves much of the credit for making this happen. "We had a very good lobbying effort," Troutman recalled, adding that Citizens' Advisory Committee chair Sandra Crow was also a key player.

Troutman went on to explain that this project has been "on hold" for several years. "We got the money and the budget first in 1999," she said. "They had the design made, and it's beautiful. Then they put it out to bid, and by that time, it was going to cost another \$1 million! So we've been trying ever since to get another million in the budget. Now we have to get the specifications and put it out to bid again, so they're not going to be starting it until next year."

Could this prompt the return of the bigger shows that have migrated elsewhere, such as those staged by the Potomac Valley Dressage Association? "PVDA has a strong faction that wants to go back to the PGEC," that organization's president Betty Thorpe acknowledged. "The group opposed to going back is worried about the footing. The last big show we had there was rained out when the rings became greasy and dangerous and the complaints were justifiably poisonous. So a covered arena would help, but the footing is our issue."

Slaughter Ban Bill Passes House

In a 263-146 vote on Sept. 7, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 503, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act. The bill amended the Horse Protection Act to prohibit the shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling, or donation of horses and other equines to be slaughtered for human consumption, and for other purposes.

Two amendments were introduced during the floor debate that would reportedly have gutted H.R. 503, but members of the House defeated them.

At press time, the bill was scheduled to move to the Senate, where Nevada Sen. John Ensign, a veterinarian, and Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu had reportedly reintroduced an identical measure.

The current administration contends that a ban would do more harm than good for horses. "We have serious concerns that the welfare of these horses would be negatively impacted by a ban on slaughter," Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said in a recent letter.

Standardization of the identification practices in the horse industry is a major focus.

Group Gives NAIS Recommendations

On Aug. 1, the Equine Species Working Group – a United States Department of Agriculture group exploring the issue of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) – made recommendations to the NAIS Subcommittee on how the equine industry might reach NAIS compliance.

The USDA initiated the implementation of the NAIS in 2004 as part of its ongoing efforts to safeguard U.S. animal health. The program is currently voluntary.

According to an ESWG press release, two key points were the focus of its report: movement and identification. Because of the extensive daily movement of horses not only intra- and

interstate, but internationally, the ESWG decided to focus on those horses that are at the greatest risk of being exposed to and/or spreading disease. Because of the burden that would be placed on horse owners or premises managers/owners by a reporting mechanism, the ESWG advised that the horse industry continue to rely on regulatory mechanisms already in place for horses that move. These regulations that require a brand inspection, Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI), VS-127 Permit or International CVI prior to movement will serve as the starting point for trace back in the event of a disease outbreak.

In the event of a disease concern, federal and state animal health officials would be able to access information about the horse's point of origin and its point of destination through those mechanisms. With the exception of the one-time official identification of the horse, these are practices currently being met

and therefore will not require the establishment of new business practices in the industry.

Standardization of the identification practices in the horse industry is also a major focus of the ESWG. With such standardization, the horse industry would be able to ensure that the impact of an equine disease emergency could be quickly managed and controlled. The ESWG recommended that states standardize requirements for Certificates of Veterinary Inspection (CVIs) and that, for NAIS compliance, horses be identified with the ISO/ANSI compatible RFID chip (11784/85, 134.2 kHz), implanted in the nuchal ligament on the left side, in the middle third of the neck, halfway between the ears and the withers.

The ESWG also recommended that official identification be performed when a horse is transported to any premises where a brand inspection, CVI, VS 127 permit, or International Certificate of Veterinary Inspection is required. ■