

Statement of  
Commissioner Julius Johnson  
Tennessee Department of Agriculture  
Importance of the Tennessee Walking Horse Industry to Tennessee

Before the  
U.S. House of Representatives Commerce, Manufacturing & Trade Subcommittee  
of the House Energy & Commerce Committee  
November 13, 2013

Chairman Terry, Ranking Member Schakowsky and Members of the Subcommittee:

As Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, I appreciate you allowing me to provide testimony on the importance of the equine industry, and especially the Tennessee Walking Horse Industry, to our state. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture has a long history of supporting the Walking Horse industry through both Republican and Democrat administrations, and we are proud of the contribution this industry makes not only to our state but to numerous rural communities across Tennessee that depend on the economic activity generated by this industry.

The equine industry is an important part of Tennessee's economy and its heritage. We are ranked among the top six states in the nation in the number of equine according to the latest Census of Agriculture. Our Market Development Division helps to support this growing industry through promotion of Tennessee trails, shows and events, and through involvement with numerous breed associations. Tennessee is home to several national breed associations in addition to the Tennessee Walking Horse.

In 2000, the Tennessee General Assembly designated the Tennessee Walking Horse the official horse of the state of Tennessee. This is a testament to the broad, bipartisan support that the breed enjoys statewide.

Based on responses to a 2009 informal survey, Tennessee has roughly 26 equine associations involving thousands of individuals. Many young people are intricately involved in these breed associations and other industry activities that lead to the development of productive, responsible citizens. I know of no better way to build character and responsibility in our young people than through the proper care and handling of horses and other livestock.

Some additional facts about Tennessee's equine industry are:

- ❖ A 2010 survey indicates 170,000 head (USDA-NASS, 2010) but a more comprehensive survey in 2004 indicates as many as 240,000 head (TDA, 2004). We believe that the numbers have not declined but rather the variation is more likely due to differing survey methodologies.
- ❖ There are 41,000 Tennessee farms with equine (TDA, 2004).

- ❖ There are 3.2 million acres, 30 percent of Tennessee's farmland, designated for equine use (USDA-NASS, 2010).
- ❖ Tennessee is ranked among the top six states in the nation in total equine, including donkeys, burros and mules. (6<sup>th</sup> in equine, 2<sup>nd</sup> in donkeys, burros and mules: USDA-NASS, 2010).
- ❖ Tennessee is ranked fifth in the U.S. in number of horse farms (USDA-NASS, 2010).
- ❖ Tennessee is ranked eleventh in the U.S. in terms of market value of equine (USDA-NASS, 2010).
- ❖ The top five breeds are the Tennessee Walking Horse, Quarter Horse, Donkey, Mule and Spotted Saddle Horse.
- ❖ The top use of equine is for pleasure and sport, or competition, and for breeding stock. Many of our livestock farms across Tennessee have brood mares for raising yearling foals. This is critical as a secondary source of farm income, helping to keep family farms profitable and viable. It is an important factor that should not be ignored. These are individual farmers with modest incomes who are trying to piecemeal successful family farming operations.

#### **Tennessee Equine Industry Economic Impact:**

- ❖ The total economic impact from the equine industry in Tennessee is \$1.4 billion.\*
- ❖ The total value-added impact of equine in Tennessee is \$746 million.\*
- ❖ The indirect business tax revenue received by state and local governments is \$61.2 million.\*
- ❖ The total estimated economic impact from horse shows and events is \$45 million. The importance of the industry to the many local and rural community charities and organizations is significant.\*
- ❖ The industry creates 20,309 jobs throughout our state, and again, especially in rural Tennessee where it is more and more difficult to attract jobs.\*

*\*Source: Menard et al, 2010*

- ❖ Sources of income from the equine industry – horse breeding, sales, events/shows, recreation, stabling equines, and training – all contribute to the state's economy. Although horse racing in other states has contributed to the industry's popularity, recent growth has come largely from equestrian sports and recreation (i.e., show jumping, field hunting, driving, cutting, roping, eventing, dressage and endurance).
- ❖ Equine owners/operations have to purchase equipment and services (clothing, tack, and trainers) to carry out these activities. Additionally, equine operations, like other livestock operations, have to purchase equipment (i.e., tractors, trucks, trailers, farm

structures and fencing), feed and hay and require the services of veterinarians and farriers.

- ❖ The breeding of equine requires investment in farmland and other assets not economically justifiable for most other agricultural enterprises. These activities also create additional tourism and recreational expenditures.
- ❖ Perhaps harder to quantify are the contributions from educational services and the institutional support provided by agricultural and veterinary schools for equine production and care (Offutt and Korb, 2006; Whiting, Molnar, and McCall, 2006).

### ***Current Issues before Congress***

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and I personally, find the soring of horses in any shape, form or fashion objectionable on every level. There should be no tolerance for animal cruelty. Walking Horse industry leaders have made what we believe are monumental strides at eliminating this practice from the industry. And we believe they are committed to a policy of zero tolerance for individuals who commit violations. We understand the motives of some to further tighten the regulation of the industry in order to protect the horse. However, we caution against overreaction by some who seek to eliminate horse shows at the expense of rural communities and horse owners, the vast majority of whom are caring and responsible in the management of their animals. Rural Tennessee would suffer the greatest as a result of this type of legislation. We urge this committee and Congress to find the right balance that protects the horse as well as ensures the viability of the Walking Horse industry should you find it necessary to pass legislation at all. The Tennessee Walking Horse is a wonderful, dynamic breed that has been the enjoyment of many around the world for its ride, gentleness and endurance.

We believe Congressman Whitfield's proposed legislation is based more on perception than sound science. We believe it is excessive and will damage the industry significantly and potentially eliminate the performance horse all together. I urge you to find sensible solutions to this issue.

Madam Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for providing me and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture to be a part of this discussion and issue that is important to all of us, but especially to rural Tennessee.