

Pro-Slaughter Group Attempts to Cash In on Horse Traceability Program While Canada Falters on its Deadline

Canadian Horse Defence Coalition (CHDC) Reports on Canada's Equine Traceability Program

Introduction

Canada's federal government and national livestock producer organizations have created the Canadian Livestock Identification Agency. Equine Canada <http://www.equinecanada.ca/index.php?lang=en> was responsible for developing an equine-specific program (CanEQUID) to satisfy federal government requirements for identification and traceability for equines, and was represented on the Board of Directors.

This paper addresses the outcome of Equine Canada's research and the demise of its planned program. Also, it addresses the desire of a pro-slaughter group to step in and implement their solution for an equine traceability program.

Both programs, however, cannot proceed without funding from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), but both could benefit very well financially if they become the group of choice to go forward with the program.

In September 2012, the CHDC wrote to Equine Canada, as well as Integrated Traceability, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada <http://www.ats-sea.agr.gc.ca/trac/con-eng.htm> to enquire on the status of this program. We are aware that a July 2013 target date is fast approaching, whereby Canada is to implement further measures to enhance the Equine Information Document (EID) system <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/meavia/man/ch17/annexee.shtml> for horses slaughtered in Canada for human consumption in Europe. Under Canada's national livestock traceability system, there is to be in place an animal identification system (lifetime passport or microchip), a premises identification program, as well as a movement tracking system between premises.

A response from Dr. Edward Kendall at Equine Canada confirmed that the CanEQUID program will not meet its end of 2012 target date for this program. AAFC has not responded to our enquiry.

In the meantime, we have been watching what is happening at Horse Welfare Alliance of Canada <http://www.horsewelfare.ca/index.php> (HWAC), Canada's dichotomous pro-slaughter "horse welfare" group, chaired by Bill desBarres. HWAC has partnered with Animal ID Solutions Inc. <http://www.animalidsolutions.com/> and has been promoting their alliance, as stated in this November 2011 news release <http://www.horsewelfare.ca/component/content/article/3-newsflash/227-international-equine-associations-align-with-a-common-purpose> from HWAC and their U.S. partner, International Equine Business Association (IEBA) <http://ieqbassn.com/sample-page/> (formerly United Horsemen of the U.S. <http://www.united-horsemen.org/>), headed by well-known U.S. pro-slaughter proponent, Sue Wallis.

It is now apparent that HWAC is working diligently to have their equine traceability program picked up by AAFC, and of course, receive the necessary funding to make it happen. On September 21, 2012, HWAC sent a letter to all HWAC partners and Canadian equine related organizations with a "Call to Action" <http://www.horsewelfare.ca/news/246-equine-identification-and-traceability> where desBarres describes the Equine Traceability Canada (ETC) program, and how ETC is the solution for this initiative. The call to action is a request to respond to the following question: **"Do you and your constituents**

support HWAC, as a non-partisan national organization, to facilitate Canadian equine identification and traceability (the ETC project) through proven, internationally accepted and secure technology?" Recipients were to respond by October 3, 2012 since "decisions must be made and action taken".

HWAC knows Canada must address its requirements for the European Commission for Canadian-based horsemeat traceability, and knows that Equine Canada's CanEQUID program will not move forward without funding from AAFC. HWAC is attempting to prove that THEY are capable of implementing a microchip program through Animal ID Solutions Inc. and are moving quickly to prove their case.

The CHDC asks, though, why would HWAC receive the funding when it was already denied to Equine Canada? Equine Canada already was approved to receive nearly half a million dollars in 2010 just to research and gather data. We know that HWAC considers its solution as "turnkey", so they propose they are in a better position to implement the program.

While the federal government may see the equine component of the Canadian Livestock Identification Agency as necessary, to bring Canada closer to a European type United Equine Lifetime Number system <http://www.ueln.net/>, it is believed that the reason HWAC is interested in being part of this solution is related solely to enhance and grow Canada's horse slaughter industry. Also, partnering with IEBA, HWAC likely envisions a solution for a traceability program for American horses. They know that 67% of horses slaughtered in Canada in 2011 were from the U.S. So HWAC can also benefit hugely if funding is provided to build this program. It would be an immense win-win for Bill desBarres and Sue Wallis - ensure Canada meets its traceability obligations with the EU, sustain and grow North America's horse slaughter industry AND partner with AAFC and potentially receive an input of millions of Canadian taxpayer dollars. Horse slaughter could be very lucrative to these crafty pro-slaughter partners.

Keep reading for the whole story, and the CHDC's conclusions.

Equine Canada

Since 2009 and earlier, Equine Canada (EC) has been included in an implementation strategy for a Canadian national equine traceability program.

Under regulations of the Health of Animals Act, Canada has a mandatory identification program for cattle, bison and sheep. Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is expanding the system to include other livestock species. According to AAFC, horses are functional livestock and are part of the national ID and traceability strategy for animal health and food safety reasons. According to Equine Canada, CanEQUID is the national traceability program for horses and will be a component of the National Livestock Traceability System for all livestock.

According to this presentation, "Equine Traceability: Moving Forward with CanEQUID" <http://www.wbfs.org/files/Val%20Evens%20-%20CanEQUID.pdf>, by Vel Evans on behalf of Equine Canada, CanEQUID is expected to be regulated by late 2012 or early 2013. Prior to this September 2010 presentation, Equine Canada announced in June 2010 in a news release, "National Equine Industry Traceability Readiness Study Began in May" http://equinecanada.ca/industry/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=168&catid=239&Itemid=546&lang=en, that **Equine Canada was approved to receive \$478,766 in funding from AAFC** for preliminary research and data-gathering initiatives for the traceability program.

Prior to this in June 2009, Equine Canada put out an "Implementation Strategy for CanEQUID" http://equinecanada.ca/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=5802&Itemid=88&lang=en which makes several references to pressing deadlines for a national equine traceability program, and emphasizes that EC is seeking AAFC funding support for completion of the project. On page 24 it is stated, "Development of the program will require AAFC financial support funding to proceed."

Vel Evans' September 2010 presentation goes into detail on the steps Equine Canada took in its 2010 research (with the \$478,766 funding from AAFC), including a national telephone research survey and a subsequent Ontario Pilot Project polling Ontario's racing sector. Their findings include data on recording retainment, movement of horses, and owners' medical treatment for horses (of which 82% of owners reported administering Phenylbutazone). The presentation lays out the timelines for CanEQUID's implementation including development over 2011/12, an industry awareness campaign in 2011/12 and expected regulations by 2013.

Subsequent to this, Equine Canada held two Equine Industry Forums; "Equine Canada 2011 Equine Industry Forum" http://equinecanada.ca/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=5796&Itemid=88&lang=en in November 2011 in Toronto, ON, and "Equine Canada 2012 Equine Industry Forum II" http://equinecanada.ca/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=5797&Itemid=88&lang=en in February 2012 in St. John's, NL. At the first Toronto Forum, Dr. Edward Kendall, Chair of the EC National Traceability Committee gave an overview on the CanEQUID program which would include "horse health history records that affect eligibility for processing".

At the February 2012 session however, the focus of the forum took a different turn. During the second session, the tone of the meeting took on a more ominous tone when equine traceability was discussed (page 8) Dr. Kendall kicked off by saying that EC has developed standards, a strategy and a plan for equine traceability in Canada, but **he revealed that the government has indicated it will not be funding the infrastructure necessary to support ID.** He brought forward some points of consideration including: the need to address this through the breed registries; and the food safety component of the plan being relatively expensive.

He also said the government seems willing to put millions behind support mechanisms for the pork and cattle sectors, but not horses. "They don't see horses as livestock and part of the food chain". He also said, "If we don't want to be part of the regulations, then now is the time to express this opinion to the government." In a telling statement he also said, "This could be seen as one more barrier to people buying horses, as we already get taxed on many inputs unlike other livestock commodities. Why should we also pay for traceability? Through our economic contributions, we are actually subsidizing the other commodities."

After these notable comments, a Motion was put to the floor: "That Equine Canada communicates to AAFC to the effect that the word Equine be removed from all current drafts of the new regulations of the Health of Animals Act related to traceability." Several interesting comments were made by the panel (page 9) such as, "We can't have it both ways, we want our horses classified as livestock, but we don't want to be regulated like other livestock." Also, "We don't want the current draft regulations, they insist on microchips and passports.", and "We don't want it."

After the Motion was carried, discussions on the merits of having a Unique Equine Lifetime Number (UELN) ensued (page 10). The forum suggested that breed registries, which already have a database in

place, add a number in front of the breed registration number, that would allow following the horse after it leaves racing, for example. "It is not more paperwork, just adding numbers in front of the breed registration number". **It was agreed that the breed registries could take this forward.**

A Motion was carried, "That the Equine Canada Delegate Assembly adopt the UELN". So in quick fashion, Equine Canada, after years of targeting implementation of the program and receiving nearly half a million dollars for research, quickly voted down any further involvement with CanEQUID. In the end, without government funding, it was no longer on the table and not worth any further discussion.

Upon discovering this revealing documentation, the CHDC wrote to Dr. Kendall at Equine Canada, as well as Integrated Traceability, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. To this date, we have not had a response from AAFC. Dr. Kendall, however, did respond by saying, "The federal government's proposed regulations are unworkable without significant public support - the federal government indicated that support was not available at this time. Equine Canada consulted with the industry and as a result requested that the regulations for horses be delayed until funding is available."

It is a known fact that an equine national traceability program be part of the requirements set out by the European Commission for horses destined for slaughter. The Equine Information Document (EID) is only the first step in a broader ranged program to create complete traceability and visibility into Canada's 1.1 million horse population. Canada has committed to creating a database that is to include all horses, not just slaughter bound equines.

Horse Welfare Alliance of Canada (HWAC)

HWAC, Canada's paradoxical pro-slaughter "horse welfare" group has partnered with Ontario-based Animal ID Solutions Inc. <http://www.animalidsolutions.com/>, which has on its web site links to its partners HWAC and U.S. partner International Equine Business Association <http://ieqbassn.com/sample-page/> (IEBA), headed by well-known U.S. pro-slaughter proponent, Sue Wallis. Over the last few years, Wallis has changed organization names and websites (United Organizations of the Horse and United Horsemen), but the message and the mission remains the same. These groups promote their alliance in this November 2011 news release <http://www.horsewelfare.ca/component/content/article/3-newsflash/227-international-equine-associations-align-with-a-common-purpose>.

According to the release, HWAC and IEBA/United Horsemen "share a common goal to mutually protect the welfare of the horse, strengthen the international horse industry, and to promote the use of horses and equine products in commercial enterprises." Welfare may be mentioned first, but make no mistake, the last part is the true purpose - use horses and horse products (after slaughter) to benefit commercially.

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The CHDC asks, though, why would HWAC receive the funding when it was already denied to Equine Canada?

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While the federal government may see the equine component of the Canadian Livestock Identification Agency as necessary, to bring Canada closer to a European type United Equine Lifetime Number system <http://www.ueln.net/>, the CHDC believes the reason that HWAC is interested in being part of this solution is related solely to enhance and grow Canada's horse slaughter industry. Also, partnering with IEBA, HWAC likely envisions a solution for a traceability program for American horses. They know that 67% of horses slaughtered in Canada in 2011 were from the U.S. So HWAC can also benefit hugely if funding is provided to build this program. It would be an immense win-win for Bill desBarres and Sue Wallis - ensure Canada meets its traceability obligations with the EU, sustain and grow North America's horse slaughter industry AND partner with AAFC and potentially receive an input of millions of Canadian taxpayer dollars.

Conclusion

First, the CHDC is alarmed that HWAC has been recognized by Equine Canada and the provincial horse federations as their partner for horse welfare in Canada. The group makes known their alliance with American extreme pro-slaughter groups International Equine Business Association, United Horsemen and United Organizations of the Horse. It is believed that Bill desBarres, with his connections at the Alberta Equestrian Federation, was able to bring other provincial federations on board, under the guise of horse welfare. He's been able to position HWAC into an influential component and partner in Canada's horse slaughter industry, as well as aligning himself with the only active pro-slaughter group trying to restart horse slaughter in the U.S.

Now HWAC appears to be attempting to position itself to become a critical cog in the wheel that completes all the necessary components in Canada's requirements for continuing to send our horses' meat to consumers in the European Union, and beyond.

Will AAFC provide the necessary funding to HWAC? Bill DesBarres' call to action letter stresses the urgency of giving him the mandate to do so. Equine Canada has not been able to complete the job -

HWAC says it has the means to be able to make it happen. If fact, they appear to be the ONLY solution that Canada has to try to meet its July 2013 traceability requirements.

However, this maneuvering by HWAC could be a savvy but desperate attempt to continue sending North American horses to slaughter. Canadian horse owners are not interested in microchipping their horses to satisfy horse slaughter requirements. The majority of North Americans do not support this industry. Are horse owners going to pay to have their horses microchipped for this purpose? We are certain the answer is NO.

HWAC's attempts to receive funding, that Equine Canada was unable to obtain, may be successful. They may get the contract, along with their partners Animal ID Solutions and IEBA. They may benefit from millions of Canadian taxpayer dollars to try to develop their Equine Traceability Canada program. However the CHDC is certain that Canadian horse owners will not embrace this program, and indeed they have no need to. People who send their horses to slaughter are likely the ones that can no longer afford to keep them. Will they be the ones microchipping their horses at their own expense? We don't think so.

Also, Equine Canada's suggestion that breed associations can be the solution for enhanced traceability may work for Canada's registered horses. However, how many of Canada's 1.1 million horses are registered? How many purebred registered horses end up in Canadian slaughter plants? True that Standardbreds and Thoroughbreds bred for racing, as well as Quarterhorses, make up a high percentage of horses slaughtered. In reality though, the large percentage of horses slaughtered are very likely unregistered.

Finally, how is this program supposed to work for U.S. slaughter bound horses entering Canada? Two-thirds of horses sent to slaughter in Canada in 2011 were from the U.S. Is Canada's traceability program going to work for U.S. horses? We all know the answer to that one is NO. How can IEBA or the other affiliated pro-slaughter groups get such a program working in the U.S. when they've been unable to secure partners or locations for horse slaughter in America? Perhaps Canada's HWAC is working to help that happen too.

Are you concerned about a pro-slaughter "horse welfare" organization taking the reins of a traceability program for Canada's equines? Your questions and comments can be directed to:

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
1341 Baseline Road
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5
Tel – 613-773-1000
Toll-free – 1-855-773-0241
Email – info@agr.gc.ca

In addition, you may wish to copy HWAC at:
Horse Welfare Alliance of Canada
Box 785
Cochrane, Alberta T4C 1A9
Email – gordmack@xplornet.ca