

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 27, 2010 – Centreville, Maryland

**NO CONVICTIONS FOR MARSHA PARKINSON AND THE RETURN OF OVER
60 HORSES AS A RESULT OF A PLEA AGREEMENT**

On February 27, 2012, the Honorable John Nunn, accepted a plea agreement between the State and Defendant Marsha Parkinson in the District Court for Queen Anne's County, in Centreville, Maryland, ending the criminal case against Ms. Parkinson for animal neglect.

On April 29, 2011, Queen Anne's County Animal Control ("Animal Control") with the assistance of the Humane Society of the United States ("HSUS"), conducted a warrantless seizure of 133 Polish Arabian horses from Canterbury Farm, a 100 acre breeding facility owned and operated by Ms. Parkinson in Centreville. The State then charged Ms. Parkinson with 133 counts of misdemeanor animal neglect. Ms. Parkinson has always denied the charges of any type of neglect and that none of her horses were ever suffering nor in any danger. Ms. Parkinson also maintains that the seizure of all of the horses by Animal Control and HSUS, a private non-profit organization, was illegal.

Don Henneke, PhD., Director of Equine Science at Tarleton State University in Texas, was prepared to testify as an expert for the defense. Dr. Henneke developed the Body Conditioning Scale for horses that is used internationally. It is frequently referred to as the "Henneke Scale." Dr. Henneke reviewed the evidence and in his professional opinion HSUS and its rescue partners (the groups responsible for the seizure) "showed a complete lack of understanding" in the application of the equine body condition scale as applied to Ms. Parkinson's horses and "exhibited extreme bias." He concluded that "the charges of neglect

against Ms. Parkinson were not warranted. The horses should not have been removed from her control and custody." A copy of Dr. Henneke's report is available upon request.

Under the agreement, the State dismissed 123 counts, and Ms. Parkinson pled "no contest" to 10 counts of "failing to provide adequate shelter." The court struck all ten counts and entered a probation before judgment, which is not a conviction on any of the counts. Ms. Parkinson will eventually apply to the court to expunge the record of the 10 misdemeanor counts not dismissed. Under the agreement, animal Control must return over 60 of her horses, selected by Ms. Parkinson, to Canterbury Farm.

"She is now able to continue her horse business which she has been successfully doing for over 40 years," stated Jonathan P. Kagan, Ms. Parkinson's attorney, from Baldwin Kagan and Gormley, in Annapolis.

"Although I would have liked to have had my day in court to prove my innocence of the false allegations and rumors of cruelty and abuse, I am happy to get my horses back and move on with my life on the farm," Ms. Parkinson stated. "They (Animal Control and HSUS) had no basis to take my horses and I should have never been charged." "HSUS saw an opportunity to grab headlines and raise significant money in order to further their own agenda at my expense," states Ms. Parkinson. "Hopefully, this will serve as a warning to other animal businesses and farmers."

Without an agreement, however, the case could have spent years in the system before it was resolved. Ms. Parkinson understood it was best to not continue the court battle. Her interest is to get her horses safely back and to continue doing what she loves.

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Marsha Parkinson

SUMMARY STATEMENT

After reviewing the documents, pictures, and video provided to me, I have made the following observations:

1. At the time of seizure, the horses do not appear to be in eminent danger from a body condition standpoint.
 - a. Horses are thin, but pictures reveal no BCS 1, only seven of the 133+ horses appeared to be BCS 2-3, and the rest appear to be BCS 3 or above.
 - b. As long as the horses were receiving adequate dietary energy to meet their maintenance needs on a daily basis from concentrates, hay, and/or pasture they did not appear to require drastic intervention.
2. The overall health of the horses appeared to be adequate.
 - a. Records provided after seizure did not reveal any significant internal parasite loads.
 - b. Blood analysis did not reveal any abnormal findings indicative of starvation or emaciation.
 - c. Records do not show any lethargy generally associated with starvation
 - d. While records do indicate that the dental health of the horses as a whole was not ideal, there are no records indicating that this interfered with feed consumption or decreased digestion.
 - e. Records indicate inadequate foot care. There is not mention of any significant lameness issues involving foot conditions.
3. Documents show that Ms. Parkinson had agreed to euthanize a small number of aged mares that were no longer able to continue to physically meet their own needs do to physiological depression associated with extreme aging.
 - a. One of the hardest decisions a horse owner has to make is regarding end of life.
 - b. Most owners will postpone making that decision as long as possible, often to the detriment of the horse in question.
 - c. Once confronted with the inevitable, the correct decision was made.
4. Ms. Parkinson had entered into an agreement concerning the care of the horses on April 15, 2011. Records show that this agreement was being adhered to at the time of seizure.
 - a. There was adequate feed on the premises to meet the daily needs of the horses.
 - b. Arrangements had been made for additional feed to be delivered.
 - c. Horses were being treated for internal and external parasites.
 - d. Documents indicate that the plan of care required by the Department of Animal Control was being followed.
5. Video of the actual seizure procedure indicates several problems.
 - a. Horses gathered from the pasture were exposed to unnecessary stress due to poor horsemanship on the part of the people conducting the seizure. The handlers caused excessive agitation of the horses. Efforts at reducing the flight stimulus were very poor. It is remarkable that a significant number of horses were not injured.
 - b. The evaluators appear to have little knowledge of the accurate application of the BCS. The lead person appears to be giving directions to unqualified people to make these decisions.
 - c. The actual body condition scoring appears to be extremely biased. One person repeatedly stresses that the scores need to be less than 3. This will lead to a tendency of the evaluator to underestimate the BCS of an individual horse.
 - d. There are references to making this case a "case against over breeding". None of the mares were in fact pregnant. This shows again a predetermined bias against the owner.

- e. The entire attitude of the seizure appears indicate that the people conducting the seizure were more interested in making a point, than ensuring the welfare of the horses.
6. Records of treatment of the horses after seizure indicate some disturbing facts.
- a. The horses appear to have gone through a prolonged period of stress after the seizure. This stress of a foreign environment, changing routine and probable change in diet would have created a decrease in their appetite and an increase in stress related physiological changes that would have adversely influenced their condition and health.
 - b. There appears to be an overuse of tranquilizers in the conduction of routine procedures such as dental work and hoof care.
 - c. Utilizing tranquilizers in a debilitated horse should be avoided. Tranquilizers will suppress cardiac and respiratory function which may jeopardize the health of the weakened animal. If these horses were truly in a weakened state, use of tranquilizers should have been minimized.
 - d. Supposedly the intent of the seizure was to address the stored of body fat in these horses. Records show that after 3-4 months, BCS had not significantly increased in most of the horses. While refeeding the staving horse requires specific slow increasing of dietary energy, these horses had been receiving feed and were not starved. Increases in BCS should have been realized much sooner than they were.

CONCLUSIONS

At the time of seizure, the horses in question were not being neglected and should have not been removed from the care of Ms. Parkinson. Ms. Parkinson was abiding by the agreement made on April 15, 2011 between her and the Department of Animal Control. The horses should have remained in her care and custody as long as she met the conditions of the agreement. Seizure and removal of the horses from the farm probably had an adverse effect on their health and well being.

This seizure appears to have been conducted to make a point. The videos indicate that the majority of the people present at the seizure were not trained in the application of the BCS, and the one person who was "trained" exhibited extreme bias in her instructions and comments. At the very least, this person showed a complete lack of understanding concerning the fat deposition patterns of the Arabian horse. She did not demonstrate in any manner an ability to accurately apply the BCS accurately to this breed that has distinct evolutionary differences from many other breeds concerning the storage of fat.

It is my professional opinion, that the charges of neglect against Ms. Parkinson were not warranted. The horses should not have been removed from her control and custody. Her efforts to conform to the agreement between herself and Animal Control should be commended.

This statement was prepared on February 26, 2012.

Don R. Henneke, Ph.D.

