

PREGNANT MARES' URINE (PMU) HORSE WELFARE ADVANCES

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Opening Remarks

On behalf of 431 ranch families, I would like to thank the Animal Welfare Committee of the United States Animal Health Association for inviting me to address such a prestigious group. In this presentation, I will give an overview of pregnant mares' urine (PMU) ranching, discuss the checks and balances in place that ensure the health and welfare of the horses, and respond to the animal activists' public relations campaign against our industry.

PMU contains the hormones needed for the production of Premarin, an estrogen replacement therapy, prescribed to women in more than 100 countries around the world, ten million of which are in North America. The family horse ranchers who collect PMU own and operate their farms, and contract independently with Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories to provide the raw material needed to manufacture this prescription medication.

The North American Equine Ranching Information Council (NAERIC)

NAERIC is a nonprofit association representing horse breeders and ranchers in North America engaged in the collection of PMU. The key thing PMU ranchers have in common with the rest of the equine profession is a sense of pride and professionalism regarding breeding, raising and handling horses. NAERIC's mission, as an educational association, is to provide education and research information to its members as well as factual and accurate information about this segment of the ranching industry to the horse industry and the general public.

Providing education on horse management issues is a top priority of our association. Each issue of our industry magazine, *Equine Ranching*, includes horse management articles tailored to the needs of our members. Through regular seminars conducted at annual meetings of each regional association, specific management issues are discussed. Sponsorship of industry-wide seminars, held in conjunction with other industry or government educational efforts, gives ranchers access to top notch speakers on a variety of subjects.

A typical PMU rancher:

- has worked in PMU ranching for more than ten years;
- is the second generation of his or her family to work the family's ranch;
- works the ranch with his or her spouse, child and one hired hand;
- cares for approximately seventy-five (75) brood mares in production;
- produces cereal grains and forages, in addition to raising other livestock.

The typical PMU ranch:

- breeds more registered Quarter Horses than any other registered breed;
- sells 50% of their foals privately; 30% at public auction; and 19% at breeder production sales.

PMU ranchers, through an industry wide checkoff program, have supported research at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Minnesota, Oklahoma State University, and the Alberta Ministry of Agriculture. Research projects have included reproduction, nutrition, behavior and disease related topics. It is anticipated that results from these research efforts will yield useful management recommendations which can be applied not only to the PMU industry, but to the horse industry at large.

Premarin as it Relates to PMU Ranching

The scientific evidence is clear; all estrogens are not the same. However, it is important to point out that Premarin is the most widely studied estrogen replacement product in the world. More than 3,000 scientific studies of estrogen have used Premarin . . . studies that have helped health care providers to better understand the benefits and risks of estrogen replacement therapy. Premarin is taken to relieve menopausal symptoms. It is also prescribed for its long-term effects in treating and preventing osteoporosis, and decreasing the risk of coronary heart disease in older, at-risk women.

On May 5, 1997, the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) announced ". . . it will not approve synthetic generic forms of the estrogen-replacement drug Premarin. This is because these generic products have not been shown to contain the same active ingredients, and therefore to work the same, as the original drug in treating women with menopausal symptoms and preventing osteoporosis."

PMU Ranching Response to the Allegations

Equine ranchers are dedicated to utilizing the most advanced animal husbandry techniques, ensuring that their horses receive high-quality care and attention. The industry operates under a science-based management practice approach and is eager to identify management changes which will further identify a "best practices" approach to caring for their horses. We have not adopted arbitrary, prescriptive standards. Practices not driven by sound science will cause disruption to the management of horses with little, if any, practical improvement for the industry.

The industry has taken the allegations made against us very seriously. We have endeavored to identify the best veterinary minds and organizations available, in order to objectively and fairly review the industry and its management practices. In our opinion, who better to assess the health and welfare of horses than veterinarians who represent some of the most respected equine organizations in the world? We have invited the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) and the International League for the Protection of Horses (ILPH) to assess the industry, and provide input and guidance for the future health and welfare of the horses under our stewardship.

It's particularly important to note that virtually every knowledgeable equine professional who has been involved with the PMU industry has recognized the outstanding care given to these horses. As with any industry, improvements can always be made. However, because improvements can be made does not mean that the fundamental management practices are flawed.

Contract Approval

All ranches contract independently with Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories to provide the estrogens in PMU. Before receiving a contract, all ranching facilities are examined and approved by company inspectors.

PMU ranchers are contractually obligated to adhere to the *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Horses in PMU Operations*. The Code was developed in 1990 to codify previously adopted ranching practices. Company inspectors, agriculture/equine specialists and veterinarians all refer to the Code's guidelines when inspecting or reviewing PMU ranches.

"The PMU Code is the most visible, the most used, and the most complied with, of all the Codes of Practice for farm animals."

- Honorable Harry J. Enns, Minister of Agriculture, Manitoba, 1996

The PMU code was the first for horses in North America, and set the standard for the Canadian wide code for horses which was released in July 1998. Current industry discussion of the necessity for a "code of practice" for horses in the United States will almost certainly look to the PMU code and the Canadian code for guidance as the concept progresses.

Checks and Balances Ensure High-Quality Care for Horses

PMU ranching has more checks and balances to ensure animal care and welfare than any other livestock industry, making it one of the most regulated and closely inspected equine-related activities in the world.

Multiple Levels of Inspection

PMU ranches have undergone many state and provincial reviews conducted by individuals representing animal welfare groups. They have found our horses to be healthy and well cared for.

- United States Department of Agriculture inspectors visited PMU ranches in March 1994 and reported that "... *the allegations of abuse and inhumane treatment were unfounded.*"
- "American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) support pregnant mare urine management." JAVMA, Vol 212, No. 11, June 1, '98.

LEVEL 1 - Pharmaceutical Company Field Inspectors

There are eight company field inspectors, two assistant supervisors and one supervisor who inspect ranches at monthly intervals, throughout the entire year. The field inspectors record and document their findings and report to the Managing Veterinarian for review and analysis.

LEVEL 2 - Veterinary Herd Health Review Program

Contracts with the ranchers require three herd health reviews each collection season, by independent, practicing veterinarians. Thus, veterinary care on PMU ranches exceeds the norm for the U.S. "household-owned" horse population, as reported by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), Center for Information Management in their 1997 report. In contrast to the fact that 100 percent of PMU ranches are reviewed by a veterinarian at least three times during the course of a year, the AVMA reported that more than 40 percent of U.S. "household-owned" horses did not receive a visit from a veterinarian.

The herd health review program was developed in conjunction with, and is monitored by, a committee of 11 individuals; eight of those being equine veterinarians officially appointed by the Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Associations and the North Dakota Board of Animal Health. There are more than 90 independent veterinarians participating in the herd health review program.

LEVEL 3 - Open Access by Provincial and State Veterinarians

Under the Animal Care Act, authority for the investigation of public concerns regarding animal neglect, abuse or cruelty is vested in the Veterinary Services Branch of Manitoba Agriculture. Department staff have the authority to investigate complaints. Similar authorization exists for the Saskatchewan SPCA under the Saskatchewan Animal Protection Act, with the Alberta SPCA and in North Dakota under the North Dakota Century Code Chapter 36-21.1. Note the following comments:

- "In the years 1995-1997, the Veterinary Services Branch of Manitoba Agriculture investigated an average of two hundred twenty cases per year. Of the one hundred fifty-one horse cases investigated, only one involved a PMU operator . . . the situation was easily resolved with some extension advise." Allan Preston, DVM, Manager, Veterinary Field Services.
- "Our records indicate the Saskatchewan SPCA has not received any specific complaints concerning horses on PMU farms for the past three years." Frances Wach, Executive Director, June 1998.
- "In answer to your inquiry about complaints concerning PMU ranches, I was able to locate one from Feb. '93 and one from Mar. '97. In both cases, no cause for concern was found by the Investigators and the files were concluded." Candace Villett, Alberta SPCA, June 1998.
- "I have been with the Board of Animal Health since December 1995. During this time the Board of Animal Health has investigated 99 cases of humane complaints. There have been no complaints concerning PMU operations." Larry A. Schuler, DVM, State Veterinarian for the North Dakota Board of Animal Health, June, 1998.

LEVEL 4 - Assessment by International Veterinary Experts

An international team of equine experts, consisting of veterinary representatives from the AAEP, CVMA and the ILPH, were invited to review PMU ranches during the 1996-97 collection season to observe the health and welfare of the horses. A consensus report was produced in May 1997, and is available. To quote from the conclusion of that report: "Based on our inspections, the allegations of inhumane treatment of horses involved in PMU ranching are unfounded."

LEVEL 5 - Other Oversight by Horse Industry Experts

In addition to the system of checks and balances in place, some of North America's leading equine experts oversee the programs, research and activities of the industry. The *Equine Management Group*, prioritizes scientific/educational goals of Linwood Equine Ranch, advises the company veterinarians on protocol development and study design, reviews and approves all final reports and reviews operations at Linwood. The *Equine Advisory Board* provides scientific expertise in the areas of nutrition, exercise physiology, internal medicine and behavior to the Equine Management Group.

Critics Claims and an Industry Response

Confinement. The collection season coincides with the time of the year when outside temperatures routinely hover between -20⁰F and -40⁰F. Every need of the mare is looked after while in the stables. Researchers have reported that behavioral parameters of PMU mares in tie stalls are normal, if not better than, what is reported for the horse industry at large. Please refer to the Proceedings of the 1998 American Association of Equine Practitioners Convention, and watch for publication of the results of research conducted by the University of Pennsylvania's College of Veterinary Medicine on this subject.

Foals. During the 1998-1999 collection season, there will be approximately 33,000 broodmares in production. According to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, our industry experiences less pregnancy loss than that reported in the horse industry at large. The majority of the foals are intended for show, recreation, rodeo, ranch and replacement markets.

Pete Fraser, the only Canadian to ever hold the position of President of the American Paint Horse Association (1994), speaking about future trends in the horse industry during the 1996 Alberta Horse Breeders and Owners Conference, stated ". . . the new generation of PMU operations that now dominate the industry are very much alive and driven by progressive, astute practices that will allow them to become major players (alone or in partnership) in the breeding of better than average animals. The combined economics of it makes too much sense to resist." Mr. Fraser went on to state, "PMU operations will be major suppliers to the performance horse and recreational markets."

Programs to ensure high quality horses are bred on PMU ranches are not unique to the industry. Consider as an example, the richest two-year-old pleasure futurity in Canada, the Manitoba 50/50 Super Horse Event, with PMU ranch bred horses being named champions the last three out of five years, and the quality of horses, the "best kept secret in North America," becomes evident.

NAERIC's marketing objectives are to create "top of the mind awareness" and to be the "brand of choice." To that end, consider the following programs which are in place:

- Breeding Enhancement Program. Thoroughbred stallions are paired with crossbred mares to produce sport horses;
- NAERIC Incentive Program. A \$1 million incentive program which matches dollar for dollar, awards, breeder incentives and other purses;
- NAERIC "Super Ranch Horse" Classic and NAERIC "Super Team" Competition. Events created to bring "entertainment value" to horse competitions while highlighting the performances of our horses.

Collection System. The system is a completely non-invasive, lightweight, flexible collection pouch, that is suspended from the ceiling (no attachment to the horse) and allows the mare to move and lie down. In fact, five university horse programs in the United States are utilizing the system in their equine nutrition research programs.

Exercise. Virtually all ranchers utilize some type of "exercise" program. In 1995, some of North America's leading exercise physiology researchers were queried, ". . . what would you recommend for a standard exercise program for our industry?" Based on a lack of research in this area, they were unable to make a recommendation. This is an area our industry is studying. Today, the program utilized is determined by each ranch manager.

"Impregnation." Otherwise know as pasture breeding, stallions are turned in with their 12 to 15 mare bands

on June 1, and removed August 1. This is as close to mother nature as it gets.

Water. Horses are watered utilizing automatic water systems. Ranchers provide all the water their horses will drink at least five times per day. Most ranches water more often. The automatic watering systems ensure horses receive fresh water multiple times each day. Ranchers' contracts are in grams of estrogen, not unit volume of urine. The pharmaceutical company pays for transportation of the PMU to the processing plant. This system provides no incentive to do anything other than manage our horses according to acceptable standards, not the least of which are the National Research Council's Nutrient Requirements of Horses.

Closing Remarks

The equine ranching industry is composed of family ranchers who collect PMU which is sold to a leading pharmaceutical company. The PMU undergoes a 125-step process to extract estrogens and make the world's leading medication for hormone replacement therapy which benefits millions of women worldwide. The ranching practice has been targeted by animal activists over the last several years, but contrary to their claims, no segment of the equine industry has received the scrutiny that PMU ranching has undergone. Many knowledgeable and informed veterinary and animal welfare organizations have inspected the ranches and found the allegations made by animal activists to be untrue. The industry, in fact, is one of the most highly regulated of any segment of animal agriculture.

None-the-less, the allegations of animal activists have been taken seriously by the industry and they have been pro-active in assessing the management of horses under their care. With the continued input of veterinarians and other equine professionals, the industry represents an outstanding partnership between horse breeding and women's health care, and is poised to become a major supplier of sport and recreational horses well into the 21st century.

I hope the presentation today has helped you as "equine professionals" better understand this small, but important segment of the horse industry. To use the words of a respected equine journalist, Kimberly Herbert, "PMU ranchers . . . should not be subjected to scorn or ridicule from people who don't know or use horses, and especially not from those of us who do."

I thank you for your time and attention. Finally, I invite you to call our office at (502) 245-0425 or visit our web site at www.naeric.org for further information.