

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE **EQUINE HEALTH SECTION**

The Equine Health Section, under the direction of Venessa Sims-Green, enforces the laws established within the state as they pertain to equine, (which includes horses, mules, donkeys and zebras). The field staff is responsible for investigating complaints of equine neglect, starvation, and abuse. The inspectors also help manage and rehabilitate impounded equine at three state facilities. They work closely with law enforcement officers in protecting the welfare of Georgia's equine and have been designated as the lead agency for emergencies and disasters involving equine. The Equine Health program is unlike any other in the country and serves as a model for other states. In addition, the inspectors monitor horse sales, auctions, horse shows, rodeos, parades, and events in correlation with the eradication of equine diseases, such as Equine Infectious Anemia. Equine Health is also responsible for performing inspections of licensed and unlicensed stables, which aids in disease control and pursuance of humane care for equine. This section ensures proper burial of deceased equine, which also assists in public health issues. All of these duties are implemented by eight Equine Inspectors and two Field Supervisors who must cover large territories to meet the demand of this growing industry.



Impoundment by the
Department of
Agriculture



Rehabilitation



After full rehabilitation by
the Department of
Agriculture

Humane Care for Equines Act

The need for protecting the welfare of equine in the state of Georgia prompted the passing of the Humane Care for Equines Act in 1992. The authority and duty was extended to the Department to ensure that all equine are provided with adequate food and water, and are treated in an uncruel and humane manner. The Act provides for inspections, impoundment, care, and disposition, including the sale of equine. This aspect of the equine health program takes up a majority of the inspector's time due to the large number of abuse complaints and the duties associated with the care and disposition of impounded horses. The section has seen a dramatic increase in the number of abuse complaints reported as well as the number of horses impounded as a result. Last year alone, the Department received a total of 1651 abuse complaints and impounded 135 equine.



Examples of Critical Conditions that Warrant Impoundment

GDA Equine Health Section: Complaints and Impoundments

The Department currently operates three Equine Impound Facilities. The Equine Critical Care Facility is located in DeKalb County, a second impound facility is in Jasper County and a third is in Pulaski County. With the continued increase in demand for services and program growth, the Equine Health Section has been challenged with the small number of inspectors covering the entire state. Due to the climbing number of impounded horses, the Department must rely on volunteers and part-time employees to assist with daily barn duties. The generosity of various organizations, individuals, veterinarians, and feed and equipment suppliers keeps the impound program operational. One such organization is the Georgia Equine Rescue League which was founded in 1992 specifically to provide support to the impound program.



DeKalb County Equine Critical Care Facility



DeKalb holds up to 15 horses. It is perfectly set up for horses that require lots of attention and may need to stay in a sling. It also has an in-ground weight scale and stocks. Our DeKalb Barn manager is Mark Thompson and he has a part-time worker, John Marasco. The barn is maintained with the help of several dedicated volunteers.



Mansfield is currently managed by Mark Thompson. Other staff members include Jessie Murray and the reliable and always smiling Willie Moore. Mansfield holds more horses than DeKalb and offers different size pastures and turn-out lots. Most horses are kept outside 24/7 but stalls are available as well. Mansfield has quite a few loyal volunteers that have been helping out this barn for years.



Our **Pulaski** Impound facility had its Grand Opening on March 26, 2009. The staff that help oversee this program are Corey Cravey and Tracy Leger. This facility allows for quicker access of care for equine in middle and south Georgia. Stressed and debilitated animals no longer have to travel long distances to be rehabilitated. The program shows the power of the human animal bond between the inmates and the horses. This facility has been a successful collaboration between the Georgia Department of Agriculture and the Georgia Department of Corrections. We are very proud of the work being done at the Pulaski Women's Prison.

In addition to investigating complaints, impounding and rehabilitating the horses, our inspectors attend Department settlement conferences and are often subpoenaed as expert witnesses in court. This aspect of their job requires extensive documentation, including written reports, photos, videos, weight data, and collection and testing of samples.

Equine Act of 1969

The Equine Health Section plays a vital role with regard to equine diseases and their control, suppression, and prevention. The Georgia Equine Act gives the Department the authority to monitor diseases such as equine infectious anemia (EIA). A negative EIA test is required within the last 12 months on all equine that are sold, traded, given away, or moved for the purpose of change of ownership in the state of Georgia. A current negative equine infectious anemia test is also required at any exhibition, rodeo, trail ride, horse show or other activity where horses are gathered. Equine testing positive for this disease must be quarantined for life at least 200 yards from any other equine or euthanized and buried.

An equine inspector is present at every equine auction held in the state of Georgia. The inspectors must ensure that each horse sold has a current, negative EIA test or that a blood sample is pulled by the veterinarian at the sale. They must also ensure that only healthy animals are sold and that all animals are treated in a humane manner. It is also the inspectors' duty to see that the sale facility, including holding pens and sale arena, is well maintained and provides

adequate lighting and ventilation. There are approximately 10 regular equine sales, most of which are held every Friday and Saturday night. The majority of the sales average approximately 20 equine per sale but some may have over 60 equine.

Equine section personnel perform epidemiological investigations and disease control measures related to EIA. Equine testing positive are quarantined and re-tested to ensure that the results are accurate. All exposed equine are quarantined and tested, they are re-tested 45 days post exposure to the positive animal. On several occasions, one positive animal has been found to expose in excess of 150 others. Due to diligent testing, no animals tested positive in 2010. Georgia has consistently had a lower percentage of positive reactors than many other states due to a stringent and effective control program and because of this several states are modeling their programs after ours.

Animal Protection Act

Another important aspect of the Equine Health Section is the licensing of over 1,500 stables in the state. The Animal Protection Act requires that any stable that charges a fee for boarding, training, breeding, riding, pulling vehicles, or other similar purposes must be licensed by the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

Licenses are issued for a period of one year, with the fees being \$100 for up to and including 10 equine, \$200 for a capacity from 11 to 20, \$300 for a capacity from 21 to 30, \$400 for 30 plus and \$200 for an equine rescue license. Late fees are assessed for any individual that has been notified in writing and has not obtained a license within 10 days of such notification.



Unlicensed Stable in Violation



Licensed Stable

The licensed facilities must provide adequate food, water, shelter, and care for all equine present. Any building used for housing equine must provide adequate ventilation, be clean and sanitary, and provide adequate shelter from the elements. Proof of a current, negative equine infectious anemia test must be maintained by the stable owner for every equine present. In 2010 the state had a total of 1644 licensed facilities.

Emergency Management

On January 27, 2000, an executive order was signed by Governor Roy Barnes in regards to emergency management and response in Georgia. The Georgia Department of Agriculture was designated as the primary agency responsible for incidents involving animals. The Equine Health Section is the primary response unit for incidents/emergencies involving equine. The section also provides rescue training for volunteers, organizations, and first responders in law enforcement. Personnel have responded to such incidents as barn fires, trailer accidents, train wrecks, trapped equine (holes, mud, water), and weather related emergencies.





Department Inspectors serve as first responders for emergency management incidents, including search and rescue.

Equine Health - Donations

The Georgia Department of Agriculture's Equine Health Section is charged with the duty of ensuring that Georgia's equine receive humane care, including receiving adequate food and water. If owners do not comply with the state's laws concerning the health and welfare of their equine, the state has the authority and obligation to impound the animals in negligent owners' care.

Since there are **no state appropriated funds** for the impound program, the department relies on the proceeds from the sale of the rehabilitated equine and donations from the public to continue caring for Georgia's abused and neglected horses, donkeys, mules, and ponies. With the state facing profound budget cuts and donations down, the program's future is uncertain as we reach an all time high in the number of cases reported and equine impounded. Therefore, we are reaching out in attempts to collect donations to help us overcome the financial deficit the impound barns face. The animals are in constant need of feed, hay, vet care, farrier care, and supplies required for daily management and housing.

The program accepts donations of services, materials, and items that can be auctioned, and most essentially, monetary donations. If you can reach out and help the abused and neglected horses, ponies, donkeys, and mules of the State of Georgia and keep the impound program in operation, please send contributions to:

**Equine Health Section Impound Program
19 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SW - Room 122
Atlanta, GA 30334-4201**

Thank you in advance for supporting the Georgia Department of Agriculture Equine Health Section's mission of stopping equine abuse and neglect here in our state.

These are a few things the impound barns are in need of:

- Building and fencing materials
- Feed
- Hay
- Bedding
- De-wormer
- Fly spray
- Pitch forks and wheel barrow
- General tools
- Tack (usable saddles, bridles - snaffle type bits in particular - saddle pad, driving lines)
- Fertilizer for pastures, weed spray, ant bed control, grass seed, etc.

For more information please contact us at 404-656-3713 or visit our website www.agr.georgia.gov.



Gary W. Black
Commissioner