USDA Postpones Implementation of Horse Protection Amendments

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WASHINGTON, D.C., January 28, 2026—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today announced that it will postpone the effective date for the Horse Protection Amendments final rule. Previously scheduled to take effect on February 1, 2026, several provisions of the rule have been vacated by the courts, and the non-vacated provisions will now become effective on December 31, 2026. This postponement follows ongoing legal developments and legislative directives aimed at providing regulatory clarity for the horse industry and federal inspectors.

The final rule, originally published in May 2024, was designed to strengthen the Horse Protection Act (HPA) by replacing the industry-led inspection model with USDA-authorized Horse Protection Inspectors (HPIs) and implementing stricter prohibitions on soring—the cruel practice of using chemicals or mechanical devices to induce an exaggerated gait in horses.

However, recent events have required further extension of the implementation timeline:

- **Judicial Vacatur:** A January 2025 decision by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas vacated several key provisions of the 2024 rule, including the prohibition of pads and action devices and the proposed replacement for the "scar rule."

- **Ongoing Litigation:** A June 2025 lawsuit challenged existing HPA regulations, including a policy prohibiting noncompliant horses from competing in subsequent classes and the current scar rule standards. A preliminary injunction granted in August 2025 has created a piecemeal regulatory environment, making it impractical to implement the surviving 2024 provisions at this time.
- **Legislative Direction:** In November 2025, a House Committee Report accompanying the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations package directed APHIS to withdraw the 2024 final rule.

"Moving forward with a partial implementation while key provisions are under litigation would result in an unworkable patchwork of rules," said APHIS Deputy Administrator Bernadette Juarez. "This delay ensures that APHIS has the time to identify the most appropriate next steps to effectively end the practice of soring while providing clarity and regulatory certainty to exhibitors, managers, and owners."

The delay also relieves horse show managers from new recordkeeping and reporting requirements that were slated to begin in February.

APHIS remains committed to ending soring and enforcing the Horse Protection Act. The agency will use this period to evaluate potential new rulemakings or revisions that align with court rulings and Congressional intent.

For more information regarding the Horse Protection Act and current enforcement standards, please visit the APHIS website.

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