

General Disaster Assistance

Introduction

Because of last summer's financial loss to horse owners and breeders due to Mare Reproductive Loss Syndrome, Congress has been examining the issue of broader disaster assistance for horse owners.

Background

In the past, horse owners have had to face a natural disaster alone. If a horse operation suffered a loss due to a natural disaster, that horse owner was not eligible for assistance from the Farm Service Agency. However, if that operation had cattle, swine, poultry or other traditional livestock, they would have been eligible to collect payments on those animals.

There is no reason why horse owners should not be eligible for federal assistance like producers of other crops and livestock affected by an emergency or disaster.

Congressional Action

The House of Representatives passed the Farm Bill on October 5, 2001. Through the efforts of Congressmen Larry Combest (R-TX), Charles Stenholm (D-TX), Ernie Fletcher (R-KY), Colin Peterson (D-MN) and Ken Lucas (D-KY), the House bill includes a broad, "generic" provision that would treat horses the same as other livestock and make them eligible for the first time for emergency assistance under the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act. This is contained in Section 521 of the House Bill.

The Senate passed its version of the Farm Bill on February 13, 2002, but it does not include the provision making horses eligible for disaster relief.

The Senate-House Conference Committee will meet and reconcile the differences in the two farm bills sometime in April 2002. The bill must pass the House and Senate again and once that is done, the final version is presented to the President for signature.

AHC Position

The AHC supports the "generic" language that is included in the House version of the Farm Bill (HR 2646). The language follows:

SEC. 521. HORSES CONSIDERED TO BE LIVESTOCK UNDER THE CONSOLIDATED FARM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT ACT.

Section 343 of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1991) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(c) LIVESTOCK INCLUDES HORSES.—The term ‘livestock’ includes horses.”