

## Illinois Track Implements Welfare Plan

by: Esther Marr

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To make its position on horse slaughter clear, Fairmount Park in Illinois has put in place a zero-tolerance policy that would take stalls away from trainers linked to that industry. The track has also created an adoption program for Fairmount runners when they retire from racing.

There are no slaughterhouses currently operating in the United States, but horses are being transported from U.S. livestock auctions to plants in Mexico and Canada.

Fairmount's new policy states: "Any trainer or owner stabling at Fairmount Park who directly or indirectly participates in the transport of a horse from Fairmount to either a slaughterhouse or an auction house engaged in selling horses for slaughter will be prohibited from having stalls at Fairmount Park." The policy also applies to any actions related to the transport of a horse from Fairmount in which the ultimate intended result is the horse's slaughter.

In 2008, Magna Entertainment Corp., which operates racetracks nationwide, formally adopted a company-wide plan promoting the humane treatment of racehorses that included the same stipulations as Fairmount's policy. Suffolk Downs in Massachusetts and Mountaineer Casino, Racetrack & Resort in West Virginia have adopted similar guidelines.

"We decided that was the right thing to do, and my wife, Janice, and I thought we should take it to the next level," said Lanny Brooks, executive director of the Illinois Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association. "If we are forbidding horsemen to take their horses to a sale where they might fall into the hands of a killer buyer, then we felt they should be given an alternative of what to do with their horse when it could no longer race."

That led Brooks to help establish a program called Racehorse Alternative Choice Environment. "We have formed the non-profit corporation, and are in the final stages of making a deal with the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation," he said.

In 2007, Fairmount created a free "horses for sale" program to help Fairmount-based horsemen sell their horses. Although that program has been successful, Brooks said it was only the first step.

"We now find that there is an increasing need to address the problem of horses that can't be sold or need time to be rehabilitated and placed in a new home," Brooks said. "This is a work in progress, and as we go along, we will constantly try to improve the program."

To cover the cost of a donation to a retirement center where the horses will be stabled, transportation, and other expenses, Brooks has proposed that each Fairmount owner allow \$2 per start to be deducted from their account and be placed into a fund that will be administered by a non-profit corporation and set up by Fairmount and the Illinois HBPA. The amount will be matched by Fairmount dollar-for-dollar at the start of the track's next meet April 7.

"This is a small amount of money for the return we will receive in the welfare of our horses and the positive public relations that will result from doing this," said Brooks, who noted response to the new adoption program so far has been overwhelming. "We did this simply because it's the right thing to do. Our horses give us all they have for as long as they can, and it's my opinion that we have an obligation to return the favor when the time comes."

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