

Testing for Fairness



By Barbara Linke

AS AQHA BEGINS ITS EXPANDED DRUG-TESTING program, some members have asked questions about the process.

AQHA began charging \$3 per horse per show for drug testing March 1 as a way to be sure all competitors have a level playing field. AQHA also wants to be sure horses at AQHA shows are treated well. Split/combined shows are considered two shows, and exhibitors are charged twice.

When exhibitors pay that \$3 fee – except for competitors in California who have a state-mandated \$5 fee – they are not paying to test horses at that particular show. Instead, exhibitors are paying into a testing fund that covers the cost of testing horses randomly at about 100 shows this year. Next year, that number jumps to about 200 shows, with a goal of 300 shows in 2007. AQHA pays about \$4,000 to test each show, so the bill for 2005 will be about \$400,000.

At the shows and special events randomly picked for testing, the testing veterinarian

randomly picks the classes to be tested. That veterinarian and the testing technicians will be wearing laminated identification badges from AQHA. They are trained in sampling procedures.

Owners or trainers of horses chosen for testing are asked to accompany the drug testing personnel to a testing stall. If the owners or trainers can't do it right then – maybe they have a class immediately following the tested class – they can appoint an agent to witness the collection of blood and urine samples and to sign the appropriate documents.

If owners don't send agents, that absence constitutes a waiver to objections about the identification of the horse, or the way the samples were collected or sealed.

The testing personnel will collect blood and urine because some drugs show up better in urine samples. Others show up better in blood samples.

Owners of horses that need to be shown immediately can tell the testers, and they will delay the testing until that class is over, although they must keep the horse to be tested under observation until samples are collected.

The testers will wait as long as necessary to obtain urine samples. The testing veterinarian is the only person who can decide to stop waiting on a shy horse. The veterinarians or trainers of the horses to be tested can collect samples from those horses, but the testing veterinarian must be present, and the tests must be performed using the testing veterinarian's equipment.

AQHA will send a notice to the owners of horses that test positive for drugs or overuse of approved medications. Those owners can ask for a second laboratory to test the samples from the horse show, but payment for second tests will be at the horse owners' expense.

These drug testing procedures were based on recommendations from a drug and medication task force. Those serving on the task force included AQHA members of the Show, Judges and Professional Horsemen's committees.

The AQHA Executive Committee approved the expansion of testing to bolster the integrity of shows and to cement AQHA's position as a leader in the equine industry in ensuring the health and welfare of the horse. ■

Barbara Linke is director of show administrative services for AQHA. To comment on this article, write to aqhajrnl@aqha.org.

Fee helps create level playing field.

