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Fourth Sound Horse Conference a Great Success

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Friends of Sound Horses (FOSH) announced that the fourth Sound Horse Conference was a powerful and positive experience that brought together veterinarians, researchers, Tennessee Walking Horse owners, breeders and exhibitors, the USDA, and numerous concerned individuals about the ongoing soring abuse of big lick Tennessee Walking Horses.

The Conference, held March 28-30 in Brentwood, Tennessee was kicked off with many of the sound horse supporters meeting each other for the first time, and all sharing ideas and leveraging relationships to develop strategies for a sound Tennessee Walking Horse future.

The Conference theme was to bring the sound horse to the forefront of the industry, and Master of Ceremonies, Marty Irby, former President of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders & Exhibitors Association, led the way. A panel discussion “Enjoying a Good Career with Gaited Horses in The Future” provided options for those wanting work within the Walking Horse industry. The optimism continued with an update on the PAST Act and a \$25,000 grant announcement from the Humane Society of the United States for individuals using, competing and promoting their Tennessee Walking Horses in non-traditional venues.

The panel, “Current Soring Tactics” provided information and education from veterinarians about technology and science currently used to identify soring and scar rule violations as well detection of caustic agents and foreign prohibited substances. Another veterinarian shared his history with the Tennessee Walking Horse and his parting of ways from the industry because all horses must be sored to achieve a big lick. A practicing veterinarian discussed his professional experience in Tennessee and the difficulty of detecting some soring methods, and another DVM discussed the actual pain felt by the horses from the act of “soring” used for achieving the big lick. He explained that it’s not just “sore” like a sore muscle, but acute pain like a throbbing tooth ache and that the horse is forced to endure and walk on that throbbing pain with both front feet.

Attendees were mesmerized by Pastor Clay Harlin’s story of being ostracized by the Tennessee Walking Horse industry after a newspaper published his factual account of widespread soring abuse, and his career change where he successfully re-crafted his professional life. The mood then lightened as others recounted how they are seeking opportunities to promote the Tennessee Walking Horse in competitions, including dressage, endurance/competitive trail and versatility, as well as horse shows.

The USDA provided inspection and violation statistics from 2013, demonstrating the very high rate of violations among big lick horses. In closing, attendees heard the current situation of a trainer who has recently left the big lick industry and his successful search for different training methods to humanely train Tennessee Walking Horses.

Sunday offered an opportunity for attendees to visit Rising Glory Farm, a sound Tennessee Walking Horse farm in Lewisburg, Tennessee, to view Tennessee Walking Horses exhibiting their natural gaits and participating in equine sporting events. Gaited horse clinician Gary Lane shared with riders and the audience how to develop a horse's natural gait, and Tennessee riding instructor, Cat Dye, and her students demonstrated numerous fun activities with their Walking Horses.

In addition to FOSH, major sponsors for this conference in 2014 included the American Horse Protection Association, Animal Welfare Institute, the Humane Society of the United States, the National Walking Horse Association, Parelli Education Institute, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Walking Horse Owners Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Veterinary Medical Association, David Pruett, Frank Neal and the Tennessee Voters for Animal Protection.

Videos and transcripts from the Sound Horse conference speakers will soon be available at www.soundhorseconference.com.

FOSH is a national leader in the promotion of natural, sound gaited horses and in the fight against abuse and soring of Tennessee Walking Horses. For more information about FOSH, or to become a member, please visit www.fosh.info or call 800-651-7993.