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Welfare and Safety Summit Participants Identify Issues and Establish Action Plans

A cross-section of prominent participants from the Thoroughbred breeding and racing industry who attended the second Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit in Lexington, Ky., on March 17 and 18 have drafted action plans in seven areas to improve conditions in various facets of the Thoroughbred industry.

The seven areas are: Track Surfaces; Marketing of the Racing Product; Catastrophic Injuries; Medication and Laboratories; Industry Education; Welfare of the Thoroughbred; and Implementation and Regulation.

Among the primary objectives identified were:

- The adoption of the following: “The welfare and safety of the horse should be the guiding principle in the decision-making process for all segments of the horse racing industry.”
- Coordinate all research regarding equine injuries and/or fatalities on all racing surfaces in all jurisdictions and publicize the results
- Create a national media strategy focusing on industry health and safety initiatives
- Create a research and development model for all racing surfaces
- Continue to support research to improve the design and utilization of equipment used to maintain racetrack surfaces
- Establish a central laboratory for timely analysis of race track surface materials in order to monitor track stability and provide a ready resource for track superintendents
- Establish uniform reporting of daily maintenance of race track surfaces
- Promote the establishment of necropsy programs in all jurisdictions and support the training of qualified observers
- Promote the standardization of pre-race exam protocol
- Coordinate a blue-ribbon panel on equine racing fatalities
- Analyze the drug-testing infrastructure to identify cost efficiencies
- Develop a research and development program for drug testing in the U.S.
- Establish national equestrian drug-testing laboratory standards and accreditation protocol, including a research and development program
- Establish uniform regulation of medication usage in sales horses
- Create a program with incentives to attract and retain qualified regulatory veterinarians
- Expand the Groom Elite program on a national basis to provide training, certification and continuing education for all backstretch workers responsible for the care and welfare of race horses
- Pursue strategies to stress owner responsibility and ensure that horses no longer wanted are not subjected to inhumane treatment or circumstances

The summit, which was coordinated and underwritten by Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation and The Jockey Club, and hosted by Keeneland Association in Lexington, Ky., was held all day Monday and Tuesday morning.

The goal of the summit once again was to identify critical issues that affect horse health and/or shorten the career of racehorses and to develop action plans to address each issue.

"The original Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit in October 2006 was not meant to begin and end with the meeting in Lexington and I think the progress we've seen in the 17 months since then is both reassuring and gratifying," said Ed Bowen, president of Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation. "With many new faces in attendance this year, I think we were able to identify additional areas of concern and realistic actions plans to address those issues."

Of the 62 participants at this summit, 36 of them had not attended the original summit, held October 16-17, 2006, also at Keeneland. (See the attached file for a complete list of participants in the second Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit.)

As was the case with the original summit, a final report and strategic plans from the second Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit will be distributed to participants in the next two to three weeks.

Nick Nicholson, the president and chief executive officer of Keeneland, commended participants and committee members from the original summit for remaining deeply involved in their respective groups and encouraged this year's participants to do the same.

"This is a great way to bring people together for the common good and Keeneland is proud not only to play host to it but to assist the various committees in any way we can," he said. "I once again commend Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation and The Jockey Club for putting the summit together."

"At industry conferences, people often look for a way not to do things, but I think there's been a feeling of mutual respect permeating the air at the summit, just as there was at the last one. Now we have to keep the momentum going and continue to make progress in the time between summits."

Monday's morning session, which started at 8 a.m. and concluded at 1 p.m., was open to the public and it included presentations by 15 industry representatives as well as a panel discussion on racing surfaces featuring five track superintendents. Ed Bowen, the president of Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, served as moderator for the morning session.

Many of the panelists provided updates on strategic plans and actions that grew out of the original summit.

Closed discussions of critical issues and actions plans in breakout groups, facilitated by a team of staff members from The Jockey Club, were held Monday afternoon. Monday evening, participants received write-ups on the days' discussions and were asked to prioritize the issues in terms of importance.

In the strategic planning sessions on Tuesday morning, each group focused on the issues and developed a primary objective, related objective, criteria for success, tasks, responsible parties, resources, and a timeline to address their issue.

A final report from the summit will be distributed to participants before the end of the month.

Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation (www.grayson-jockeyclub.org) has allocated \$1,226,457 to underwrite 24 research projects in 2008, including 14 new projects and the continuation of 10 two-year projects approved in 2007. Foundation-funded research helps not only Thoroughbreds and racing, but all breeds and uses of horses. During the last 25 years, the Foundation has underwritten 239 projects at 35 universities for more than \$15.5 million.