Investigation at Mel Hoovers Horse Auction in New Holland, PA

1. General Information

Date:
March 6, 2010

Location:
834 Wallace Rd.
New Holland, PA

Owner/Manager:
Mel Hoover

Veterinarian:
Dr. Paul Knepley (State Veterinarian)
2301 N. Cameron St.
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717.772.2852 fax: 717.787.1868
pknepley@state.pa.us

No veterinarian was observed at the market

Market Schedule:
Saturdays  9:00 AM

The investigation was trigged because we received information that apparently Mel Hoover accepts horse at his sale that New Holland Auction refuses.

2. Observations

We arrived at Mel’s Stables at 9:00 AM. Temperature was 40 degrees Fahrenheit and sunny. The crowd was large, mainly Amish. The facility is an old wood construction. The pens were small and alleys quite narrow. The facility has only limited parking and livestock trucks, car and Amish buggies were parked all over the premises. We got the impression that the barn is not suited to accommodate several hundreds of horses.

Outside the barn, a circular track was constructed and the Amish used it to “test drive” the horses. The auction area consisted of a straight alley, in which the horses were paraded back and forth. Bleacher style seats were on both sides of the alley, and a second floor with restaurant overlooked the auction ring.
None of the horses had access to hay or water. Water buckets were tied to the fences of each pen, but all of them were empty. Many of the inside and outside pens were overcrowded with some of the horses severely agitated. These horses kicked, bit and fought continuously. It was a miracle that no horses were killed or injured. Mel Hoover made an announcement that over 300 horses were for sale on this day. The facility is not capable to safely and humanely accommodate 300 horses. Horses, which did not have room in the pens, were left outside tied to an old farm wagon.

The condition of the first group of horses to be sold, were poor and the prices reflected that. They sold at a fast pace with little bidding between the attendees. 60 horses were sold in the first hour. The second group consisted of draft horses and was sold in 42 minutes. A black draft horse was blind in the left eye and went for $75 USD. Buyers #204, “David” and “Jonas” were observed purchasing a large number of horses. The handling inside the barn was rough. The handlers used the whip frequently and with full force.
At 09:15, in an alley we observed a draft horse tag #070 down between two other draft horses. Handlers tried to force her to stand, but she continued to go back down. At 10:10, she was led into the ring and was purchased by “Jonas” for $175 USD. She was then led outside and tied next to the wagon. During this sale, Mel Hoover made an announcement that 6 draft horses (tag #’s 070, 125, 126 and 3 others) arrived on the night of March 5th from St. Mary’s County, Maryland. (This trip consists of approximately 194 miles and 4 hours). He also announced that every sale inside the auction ring is filmed and documented, in case something is wrong with the animal.

During the bidding the auctioneer kept a running commentary at odds with the condition of the horses, such as “Coggins ready and good to go” or “excellent deal, just tired”. After the draft horse sale, Hoover made an announcement that he was expecting 20 more draft horses from Minnesota (a trip of 18 hours and 1,107 miles) to arrive at 20:00 on the 6th and another 15 horses from Kentucky (a trip of 9 hours and 587 miles) to arrive at around midnight on the 6th.
In one of the outside pens, we observed a thin horse which seemed to be fighting a Strangles infection. Yellow discharge was running out of her nostrils, she did not move and looked weak. She did not have access to water either.

**Conclusion:**

There are several areas of concern:

No access to water  
Dangerously overcrowded pens  
Auction accepts sick/emaciated horses