



Livestock and Not Companion Animal

The Missouri Equine Council supports the legal definition of all domesticated equines to remain as livestock and opposes the current social trend of referring to them as pets or companion animals. The horse has long been considered livestock in the United States and throughout the world and changing the legal definition of horses to companion or other non-livestock animal would adversely affect not only the owners, but the animals themselves.

On the federal level, the care and regulation of horses and horse related activities come under the purview of the United States Department of Agriculture. It is the responsibility of the USDA to improve and maintain farm income and to carry out agricultural research. The USDA provides technical expertise and monetary support for research into the prevention of many equine diseases. The USDA is also responsible for the development and enforcement of the Horse Protection Act and the Safe Commercial Transportation of Equine to Slaughter Act. On the state level, the state department of agriculture is charged with the regulation of horse related activities and assists the horse industry through research and regulatory programs. Changing the livestock status of horses could result in losing financial support for research, regulation and disaster relief on both the federal and the state levels.

Livestock anti-cruelty laws are usually written to ensure humane treatment and care while still providing for the use of the animal. If horses were to be legally considered non-livestock, these laws would no longer apply. This status change would also have a major impact on limited liability laws and would no longer provide the much needed protection for stable owners, equine owners, event organizers and service providers.

Currently, under federal tax law, commercial horse owners and breeders are treated as farmers. Certain tax ramifications could be changed and have a negative impact if horses were not considered as livestock. In addition, horse owners and breeders are treated differently by state excise and sales taxes because horses are now considered livestock. These advantages could be lost. If horses were no longer livestock, horse breeding would no longer be an agricultural endeavor and federal and state taxes for horse operations could increase.

The terms livestock and companion animal are becoming interchangeable by the media and even in veterinary literature. Words are power and as we become accustomed to the flip-flopping of the terms "livestock and companion animal" the public and then the legal community will come to accept the status change and then the legal change will follow. It is for these reasons that the Missouri Equine Council strongly opposes any efforts to change the status of horses from agricultural livestock to companion animals.

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1-800-313-3327**