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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

In re:	)	
	)	
	)	
JEFF BRONNENBURG, an individual,	)	HPA Docket No. 17-0121
	)	
	)	
Respondent	)	

DEFAULT DECISION AND ORDER

Appearances:

Colleen A. Carroll, Esq., and John V. Rodriguez, Esq., with the Office of the General Counsel, United States Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington D.C. 20250, for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service [APHIS]; and

Steven M. Mezrano, Esq., Homewood, AL, for the Respondent Jeff Bronnenburg.

Preliminary Statement

This proceeding was instituted under the Horse Protection Act, as amended (15 U.S.C. § 1821 *et seq.*) [Act], and the regulations promulgated thereunder (9 C.F.R. §§ 11.1-11.4) [Regulations]. This proceeding initiated with a complaint filed on January 11, 2017 by the Administrator, Animal and Plant Health and Inspection Service [APHIS], of the United States Department of Agriculture [USDA; Complainant]. The Complaint alleges that Jeff Bronnenburg [Respondent] violated the Act with respect to a horse, Prince at the Ritz.[1]

The Rules of Practice Governing Formal Adjudicatory Administrative Proceedings Instituted by the Secretary Under Various Statutes [Rules of Practice], set forth at 7 C.F.R. § 1.130

[1] Prince at the Ritz is believed to be a five-year-old stallion registered as 21103821.

et seq., apply to adjudication of the instant matter. Pursuant to the Rules of Practice, Respondent was required to file an answer within twenty (20) days after service of the Complaint. 7 C.F.R. § 1.136(a). The Hearing Clerk's records reflect that Respondent failed to file a timely answer to the Complaint.[2]

On February 21, 2017, Complainant filed with the Hearing Clerk a "Motion for Adoption of Decision and Order by Reason of Default" [Motion for Default] and proposed "Decision and Order by Reason of Default" [Proposed Decision].[3] Also on February 21, 2017, Respondent filed his untimely[4] Answer to the Complaint. On March 6, 2017, Respondent filed an "Opposition to Petitioner's Motion for Adoption of Decision and Order by Reason of Default" [Opposition to Motion],[5] in which Respondent raised a number of constitutional claims and asserted that "the case should be dismissed."[6]

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[2] United States Postal Service records reflect that the Complaint was sent via certified mail and delivered to Respondent's address on January 26, 2017. Respondent had twenty (20) days from the date of service to file a response. Weekends and federal holidays shall be included in the count; however, if the due date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or federal holiday, the last day for timely filing shall be the following work day. 7 C.F.R. §§ 1.147(g), (h). In this case, Respondent's Answer was due by February 15, 2017 but was not filed until February 21, 2017. Failure to file a timely answer or failure to deny or otherwise respond to allegations in the Complaint shall be deemed, for purposes of this proceeding, an admission of the allegations in the Complaint, unless the parties have agreed to a consent decision. 7 C.F.R. § 1.136(c). Other than a consent decision, the Rules of Practice and Procedure do not provide for exceptions to the regulatory consequences of an untimely filed answer.

[3] United States Postal Service records reflect that the Motion for Default and Proposed Decision were sent via certified mail and delivered to Respondent's address on February 27, 2017.

[4] *See supra* note 2.

[5] In his Opposition to Motion, Respondent argues he was "never served with APHIS's Complaint." However, as discussed in footnote 2, United States Postal Service records reflect that the Complaint was sent via certified mail and delivered to Respondent's address on January 26, 2017. Respondent's address appeared on the entry forms that he signed for the three horses at issue in this case.

[6] These constitutional issues were addressed in my April 5, 2017 "Order Denying Respondents' Motion to Dismiss or Abate Proceedings and Complainant's Motion to Certify Question to the Judicial Officer."

Complainant opposed both the dismissal and abatement of this proceeding, and on March 10, 2017, Complainant filed a "Motion to Certify Question to the Judicial Officer" [Motion to Certify].[7] Respondent did not file a response to the Motion to Certify,[8] and on April 5, 2017, I issued an "Order Denying Respondents' Motion to Dismiss or Abate Proceedings and Complainant's Motion to Certify Question to the Judicial Officer."

Failure to file a timely answer or failure to deny or otherwise respond to allegations in the Complaint shall be deemed, for purposes of this proceeding, an admission of the allegations in the Complaint, unless the parties have agreed to a consent decision. 7 C.F.R. § 1.136(c). As Respondent failed to file an answer within the time period prescribed in section 1.136 of the Rules of Practice (7 C.F.R. § 1.136), this Decision and Order is issued without further procedure or hearing pursuant to section 1.139 of the Rules of Practice (7 C.F.R. § 1.139).

Findings of Fact

1. Jeff Bronnenburg is an individual with a mailing address in North Carolina. At all times mentioned herein, Respondent was a "person" and an "exhibitor," as those terms are defined in the Regulations issued pursuant to the Act (9 C.F.R. § 11.1 *et seq.*).
2. The nature and circumstances of the prohibited conduct alleged in the Complaint are that Respondent allowed the entry of a horse he owned in a show while the horse was "sore," as

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[7] Complainant moved to certify the following question to the Judicial Officer:

> Should the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Administrative Law Judges continue to preside over administrative proceedings before the Secretary of Agriculture unless and until such time as there is a final determination by the federal courts that they lack authority to do so?

[8] The Hearing Clerk's records reflect that Respondent's counsel was served via email with the Motion to Certify Question on March 13, 2017. Respondent had twenty (20) days from the date of service to file a response. Weekends and federal holidays shall be included in the count; however, if the due date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or federal holiday, the last day for timely filing shall be the following work day. 7 C.F.R. §§ 1.147(g), (h). In this case, a response was due by April 3, 2017. Respondent did not file a response.

that term is defined in the Act and Regulations. The extent and gravity of the prohibited conduct is great. Congress enacted the Horse Protection Act to end the practice of making gaited horses, including Tennessee Walking Horses, "sore" for the purpose of altering their natural gait to achieve a higher-stepping gait and gaining an unfair competitive advantage during performances at horse shows.[9]

3. Respondent is culpable for the violations alleged in the Complaint. Owners of horses are absolute guarantors that those horses will not be sore within the meaning of the Act when they are entered or shown.[10]

Conclusions of Law

1. The Secretary, USDA, has jurisdiction in this matter.
2. On or about August 27, 2016, Respondent allowed the entry of a horse he owned (Prince at the Ritz) while the horse was sore, for showing in class 84B in a horse show in Shelbyville, Tennessee, in violation of the Act (15 U.S.C. § 1824(2)(D)).

9

> When the front limbs of a horse have been deliberately made "sore," usually by using chains or chemicals, "the intense pain which the animal suffered when placing his forefeet on the ground would cause him to lift them up quickly and thrust them forward, producing exactly [the distinctive high-stepping gait of a champion Walker]." H.R. Rep. No. 91-1597, 91st Cong., 2d Sess. 2 (1970), *reprinted in* 1970 U.S.C.C.A.N. 4870,4 871. Congress' reasons for prohibiting this practice were twofold. First, it inflicted unnecessary pain on the animals; and second, those who made their animal "sore" gained an unfair competitive advantage over those who relied on skill and patience. In 1976, Congress significantly strengthened the Act by amending it to make clear that intent to make a horse 'sore' is not necessary an element of a violation. *See Thornton v. U.S.D.A.*, 715 F.2d 1508, 1511-12 (11th Cir. 1983).

Edwards, 55 Agric. Dec. 892, 950 (U.S.D.A. 1996).

[10] Carl Edwards & Sons Stables, 56 Agric. Dec. 529, 588-89 (U.S.D.A. 1997); Edwards, 55 Agric. Dec. 892, 979 (U.S.D.A. 1996).

ORDER

1. Respondent is assessed a $2,200 civil penalty, which shall be paid by certified check or money order, made payable to the "Treasurer of the United States," indicating that the payment is in reference to HPA Docket No. 17-0121, and sent to:

   USDA, APHIS, MISCELLANEOUS
   P.O. Box 979043
   St. Louis, Missouri 63197-9000

2. Respondent is disqualified for one year from showing or exhibiting any horse in any show, horse exhibition, horse sale, or horse auction, directly or indirectly through any agent, employee, corporation, partnership, or other device, and from judging or managing any horse show, horse exhibition, horse sale, or horse action.

3. This Order shall take effect on the day that this Decision becomes final.

This Decision and Order shall be final and effective without further proceedings thirty-five (35) days after service unless an appeal to the Judicial Officer is filed with the Hearing Clerk within thirty (30) days after service, pursuant to section 1.145 of the Rules of Practice (7 C.F.R. § 1.145).

Copies of this Decision and Order shall be served by the Hearing Clerk upon each of the parties with courtesy copies provided via email where available.

Done at Washington, D.C.,
this 11th day of April, 2017

[redacted]

Bobbie J. McCartney
Chief Administrative Law Judge

Hearing Clerk's Office
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Washington, D.C. 20250-9203
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