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## WEG picks natural walking horses for exhibits

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A controversial Tennessee Walking Horse group will not be allowed to participate in the Equine Village at the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games after all.

Instead, the Games will highlight the National Walking Horse Association, which prohibits devices and practices that exaggerate the horse's natural gait.

The Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association had asked to participate in the exhibitions planned at the Kentucky Horse Park during the Games next fall and, according to WEG board chairman John Long, the WEG board had decided in December to allow them.

But last month, as the board was finalizing the list of participants, they changed plans and refunded the Tennessee Walking Horse group's \$20,000 deposit instead, said Jamie Link, WEG 2010 Foundation chief executive officer.

"We recognized there is some controversy surrounding that breed. We made the decision that it's not in our best interest to provide a showcase for a controversy like this," Link said Thursday.

A small percentage of walking horses, which have a naturally smooth gait, are trained in a highly stylized high-stepping performance gait for competitions. This sometimes involves use of illegal devices and substances to make the horse's feet sore. These practices, known as "soring," are banned under the federal Horse Protection Act, enforced by the USDA.

The Tennessee Walking Horse group had agreed not to bring any walking horses in padded shoes or chains, and guaranteed none of the horses exhibited would be "sore."

But in the end WEG "went a different direction," Link said, although he emphasized that the board wants to support the Tennessee Walking Horse group's efforts to rehabilitate its image and reform training methods.

"Ultimately, we decided (the Tennessee Walking Horse Group) was just probably not the best fit," Link said. "We do want to showcase the walking horse because it's inherent to Kentucky's culture."

Fifty-three equine organizations and presenters will be part of the Equine Village. The exhibited breeds will range from Andalusians to Connemaras to Paso Finos.

All information regarding the Equine Village is available on the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games Web site at [www.alltechfeigames.com](http://www.alltechfeigames.com). Equine organizations seeking involvement in the Equine Village can contact Layson Griffin at [layson.griffin@ky.gov](mailto:layson.griffin@ky.gov) or at 859-948-5919.

The World Games will take place at the Kentucky Horse Park from Sept. 25 to Oct. 10, 2010.

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