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Contraceptive Vaccine for Horses: A Cash Cow? (/full-blog/2012/05/contraceptive-vaccine-for-horses-cash.html)

"Environmental Protection Agency" (/full-blog?category=%22Environmental+Protection+Agency%22), "Human Society of the United States" (/full-blog?category=%22Human+Society+of+the+United+States%22), "PZP" (/full-blog?category=%22PZP%22), "ZonaStat-H" (/full-blog?category=%22ZonaStat-H%22), "contraceptive vaccine" (/full-blog?category=%22contraceptive+vaccine%22), "porcine zona pellucida" (/full-blog?category=%22porcine+zona+pellucida%22)



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The Environmental Protection Agency has officially registered the first contraceptive vaccine for use in horses, with The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) sponsoring the registration.[1] The vaccine was registered under the brand name ZonaStat-H but is commonly known as porcine zona pellucida (PZP) and is touted as a “win-win-win” by HSUS President and CEO, who indicates it will be good for horses, the environment, and taxpayers.[2]

This vaccine is making headlines across the Nation because of its potential to mitigate the problems associated with the approximately 12 million unwanted horses in the United States.[3] The HSUS estimates the vaccine’s use could save taxpayers millions of dollars over the next decade.[4] A U.S. Geological Survey indicated PZP could save as much as \$7.7 million annually.[5] Wayne Parcell, President and CEO of the HSUS, posted in his blog—hosted on the HSUS website—that using PZP could save taxpayers tens of millions over the next decade.[6] The question obviously becomes: which is it? Unfortunately, the answer could be none of the above. To determine if PZP will really save taxpayer money, we must compare the cost of administering the vaccine with the tax dollars the vaccine will save.

Data on cost and pricing for ZonaStat-H was not as readily available as I anticipated, but there is data available on PZP. In 2006—when PZP was being used to control deer population—the cost per dose was between \$10 and \$25, but was predicted to decrease as production became more efficient. [7] In 2008, however, PZP still cost \$21 per dose when used on mares. [8] The problem with these figures is that they do not appear to fully impute all costs of producing the vaccine. The Science and Conservation Center is the boutique operation producing the PZP currently registered as ZonaStat-H. [9] The Center has three scientists and they only make a few thousand doses of the vaccine a year, with each batch taking about 25 hours over the course of week to make.[10] So let’s assume they make 2,000 doses, which allegedly cost around \$21 each, that’s a total cost of \$42,000. The full cost of each vaccine needs to impute the cost of the scientist’s time, the cost of the facility, the Center’s overhead costs, the costs of the chemical components, etc. It seems impossible that that a cost figure around \$21 accounts for anything besides the chemical ingredients to make PZP. Furthermore, when you account for the costs to actually administer the vaccine, cost estimates quickly rise to between \$200 and \$300 per dose.[11]

Ok so it’s an expensive dose, but how does it compare to the taxpayer savings that will be generated? Since 1971 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has been charged with wild horse and burro management.[12] In 2011, BLM budgeted approximately \$64 million for wild horse and burro management.[13] In 2012 their plan is to shift horse and burro management to focus on fertility control, moving away from federally funded wild horse preserves.[14] So how much taxpayer dollars will this shift save? None. The 2012 budget requests an increase of \$12 million for horse and burro management in order to facilitate the new plan.[15]

I’m having a hard time finding where these tax dollars are going to be saved. None of this is an argument against the potential utility of PZP, nor is it intended to deny the severity of the unwanted horse population. To the contrary, PZP appears to be an instrumental step in a positive direction. My point is only that if the President and CEO of the HSUS is going to blog about the tens of millions of taxpayer dollars which will be saved, perhaps Mr. Parcell should give the taxpayers the respect of tweeting some financials supporting that position. (@KJEANRL)

[1] *Environmental Protection Agency Announces First Fertility Control Vaccine Approved for Wild Horses in the United States: Wildlife managers join The Humane Society of the United States in support of action*, HUMANE SOCIETY U.S. (Feb. 17, 2012),

http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press_releases/2012/02/EPA_Announces_First_Fertility_Control_Vaccine_for_Wild_Horses.html.

[2] *Id.*

[3] Brittany Wooley, *Horse Overpopulation Addressed by Locally Produced Wildlife Contraceptive Vaccine*, Q2 KTVQ.COM (Feb. 16, 2012, 1:46 PM), <http://www.kpax.com/news/mt-company-helping-with-horse-over-population/>.

[4] *Environmental Protection Agency Announces First Fertility Control Vaccine Approved for Wild Horses in the United States: Wildlife managers join The Humane Society of the United States in support of action*, HUMANE SOCIETY U.S. (Feb. 17, 2012),

http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press_releases/2012/02/EPA_Announces_First_Fertility_Control_Vaccine_for_Wild_Horses.html.

[5] *EPA Approves New Horse Contraceptive Vaccine*, GREATFALLSTRIBUNE.COM (Feb. 17, 2012, 10:00 PM), <http://www.greatfallsstribune.com/article/20120218/NEWS01/201202180310/EPA-approves-new-horse-contraceptive-vaccine>.

[6] Wayne Parcell, *Humane Population Management – For Horses and Other Mammals*, WAYNE PARCELLE: A HUMANE NATION (Feb. 17, 2012, 10:50 AM), <http://hsus.typepad.com/>.

[7] *Frequently Asked Questions on IMMUNOCONTRACEPTION*, WILDLIFE FERTILITY CONTROL: THE CUTTING EDGE OF SCIENCE, http://www.pzpinfo.org/pzp_faqs.html (last modified Sept. 14, 2006).

[8] Dorinda Troutman, *PZP – Equine Contraceptive*, ROCKY MOUNTAIN RIDER MAGAZINE, <http://www.rockymountainrider.com/articles/pdfs/0508%20PZP%20Equine%20Birth%20Control.pdf> (last visited Feb 29, 2012).

[9] *EPA Approves New Horse Contraceptive Vaccine*, GREATFALLSTRIBUNE.COM (Feb. 17, 2012, 10:00 PM), <http://www.greatfallsstribune.com/article/20120218/NEWS01/201202180310/EPA-approves-new-horse-contraceptive-vaccine>.

[10] *Id.*

[11] *Id.*; Dorinda Troutman, *PZP – Equine Contraceptive*, ROCKY MOUNTAIN RIDER MAGAZINE, <http://www.rockymountainrider.com/articles/pdfs/0508%20PZP%20Equine%20Birth%20Control.pdf> (last visited Feb 29, 2012).

[12] 16 U.S.C.A. § 1331 et seq. (West 2012).

[13] *Bureau Highlights*, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Communications_Directorate/public_affairs/news_release_attachments.Par.11093.File.dat/BLM_fy2012_budget_in_brief.pdf (last accessed Feb. 29, 2012). (<http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383>)

[14] *Id.*

[15] *Id.*

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