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## **DEVELOPING GENETIC TOOLS WILL LEAD TO MAJOR HEALTH ADVANCES FOR HORSES WORLDWIDE**

### **Morris Animal Foundation to Begin Phase One of International Equine Health Consortium with Funding from Nonprofit, Corporate Partners**

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**Denver, July 17, 2007** – Equine scientists will begin developing a unique set of research tools that will lead to major advances in the health of horses worldwide. The ability to begin this research is thanks to funding of phase one of Morris Animal Foundation’s Equine Consortium for Genetic Research.

The first of these research tools, SNP chips, will allow researchers to define underlying genetic factors that influence highly heritable as well as common equine diseases, such as tying up, heaves, laminitis and osteochondrosis. With these chips, the consortium members will take the first step in reaching their long-term goals of understanding inherited diseases as well as the influence of genetics in the development of non-inherited equine diseases. This will impact the health of horses by developing new ways to diagnose, treat and prevent disease. In addition, the genetic information gained will serve as a valuable tool for managing breeding programs and preventing disease.

“Equine diseases are not all necessarily directly inherited,” says Dr. Patricia N. Olson, president and CEO of Morris Animal Foundation, “but understanding the role genes play in the development of diseases will greatly impact our ability to treat horses.”

Phase one of this project is possible in part through generous donations from the AAEP Foundation, including The Aringo Memorial Fund; the ASPCA; the Keeneland Foundation and generous individual donors.

The Equine Consortium for Genetic Research is a five-year, \$2.5 million project to rapidly advance equine health. Led by University of Minnesota professors Jim Mickelson and Stephanie Valberg, the consortium includes 32 scientists from 18 elite academic institutions throughout nine countries. The recent sequencing of the equine genome will help these scientists make major health breakthroughs for horses.

“An explosion of knowledge about human disease occurred after the human genome was sequenced in 2001. These rapid advances can now be paralleled in the horse with the sequencing of the equine genome in 2007 and the support of the Morris Animal Foundation Equine Consortium,” Valberg says. “We are really excited to soon have the tools that will take the equine research community to the forefront of scientific discovery.”

**Media Interviews Available With:**

Dr. Stephanie Valberg, University of Minnesota

Dr. James Mickelson, University of Minnesota

Dr. Patricia N. Olson, President/CEO, Morris Animal Foundation

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**About Morris Animal Foundation:** Morris Animal Foundation, established in 1948, is dedicated to funding research that protects, treats and cures companion animals and wildlife. MAF has been at the forefront of funding breakthrough research studies benefiting animals in some 100 countries, spanning all seven continents on earth. MAF has its headquarters in Denver, Colorado. The Foundation has funded more than 1,300 humane animal health studies with funds approaching \$50 million. One hundred percent of all annual, unrestricted contributions support animal health studies, not administration or the cost of fund raising. For more information, call (800) 243-2345, or visit [www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org](http://www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org).