

In addition to the primary concern with the increasing cost, shortage and poor quality of feed related to two years of arid conditions, other horse related items have also increased in price including board, insurance costs, utilities, fuel, show and competition entry fees, veterinary service/supplies, etc.

Inappropriate breeding methods or weak management was believed to be a significant reason for the decrease in the quality of some horses in Alberta. It was felt that prominent and respectable bloodlines would be jeopardized by poor selection processes and that this would further decrease the already reduced selling prices of horses. Lack of education and training were perceived as the primary factors that affect this breeding issue.

The lack of positive publicity and lack of lobbying efforts were reported as a concern by a number of owners. These owners believed that the government did not see the equine industry as a “legitimate entity” and consequently the industry was not afforded the same support and respect that the cattle and other industries receive. They also reported that the public needed to be enlightened about the industry in order to garner support and to promote all aspects of the industry rather than just sport-recreation events and image. This would encourage growth in the industry.

Animal rights groups and environmental activists were seen as a concern. Owners believed that these organizations were poorly educated in the area of horse management and were not qualified to render opinions or interfere with the industry. Concerns were also raised that disease and horse abuse would rise because of the high levels of frustration caused by the high cost of daily maintenance. Some owners felt that they might not be in a position to properly feed and/or medicate their horse(s) due to lack of funds, indicating a need for more education on fiscal management.

### **Horse Industry Association of Alberta**

Seven hundred and ninety-one horse owners provided 893 comments on areas in which they felt the Association could provide assistance. The following table reflects the frequency with which items were selected.

### HORSE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA

(n=791)

(Frequency of selection percentage)

|                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| Information            | 26.5 |
| Liaison                | 22.3 |
| Education              | 19.5 |
| Promotion              | 15.2 |
| Don't know             | 12.0 |
| Set Industry Standards | 8.7  |
| Funding                | 6.7  |
| Facilities             | 4.5  |
| Develop a Website      | 2.3  |
| Price Controls         | 1.5  |
| Incentive Program      | 0.9  |
| Certification          | 0.4  |

Table 39. Horse Industry Association of Alberta

Primarily the Association could be of assistance to horse owners in the provision of information, educational programs, industry studies, promotion and advertising for the industry and as a liaison between governments, Associations, and horse owners and breeders.

The Association was felt to be a primary source of current and valuable information in relationship to industry trends and concerns through the Horse Breeding and Owners Conference. Specific examples related to health related issues, breeding information, business and management advice, and upcoming events could be achieved through a regular newsletter, brochures and an interactive website. Horse owners reported that they would like to see an interactive web-site with current information on issues related to their industry. Owners indicated the desire to be able to post questions and receive responses from other individuals involved in the industry. A provincially distributed directory of horse related government agencies, breeders and horse related businesses was deemed to be a useful tool for the industry.

Horse owners would also like to see the Association play a stronger role as the primary liaison between the industry and the local, provincial and federal governments, both federally and provincially. A number of owners felt that the goods and services tax ("GST") should not be charged on horse sales and that horse

owners were not afforded the same tax deductions as cattle farmers. It was believed that more positive promotion would create a governmental and public awareness that the horse industry is a valid business entity and that the individual horse owner should be regulated as such and receive the same tax benefits.

Education was a concern for many respondents and they believed that the Association should be responsible for coordinating information gatherings such as workshops, clinics, conferences and seminars. It was believed that as a result of uneducated horse owners, some animals were being put at risk, as they were not appropriately cared for. This in turn affected the quality of horses in Alberta through improper breeding methods and the use of poor quality and uncared for horses. It was also perceived that pastures and recreational areas are at risk both qualitatively and quantitatively due to mismanagement. Specific courses which respondents expressed interest in were:

- Pasture Management
- Manure Disposal Methods
- Nutrition
- Health
- Horsemanship
- Tax Regulations
- Horses in the Therapeutic Industry (for disabled riders)
- Feed Testing
- Soil Testing
- Business Management

Further to educating horse owners in the specific areas mentioned above, it was also suggested that Trainer Certification and Breeder Certification be implemented and regulated by the Association. A B.Sc. Equine Science Program could be offered at the University of Alberta or the University of Lethbridge, similar to the Business Management, Horse Science program offered at Montana State University, and should be promoted and marketed to all horse owners in Alberta to ensure the ongoing viability of the horse industry.

Due to the higher costs of raising horses, it was believed that the Association should play a stronger role in the advocacy of price controls for feed (hay and grains) and the creation of a cap on the rates for veterinarian services. Show and competition fees were also believed to be too high.

A number of owners suggested that the quality of horses in Alberta was dropping and by establishing and managing breeding and operating standards, this decline could be slowed or reversed. Specifically,

respondents believed the Association should help regulate: breeding, quality of facilities, land use (recreational and pasture management), and the importing and exporting of horses. Respondents perceived that without appropriate monitoring of breeding of lower quality horses, high quality bloodlines would be affected. As an aside, it appears that those responding to this survey and specifically those who feel that the Association has regulatory and legislative powers are unaware that the Association has neither. The Association exists for its members as an information and advocacy organization.

Respondents believe that the government is enforcing too many regulations on land use and a number felt that the Association should be directly involved in regulating the increased use of public lands for recreational riding purposes. Respondents reported that ATV's were given a higher priority on public lands than horse owners. The poor quality and limited number of sport-recreation riding facilities/sites was commented on. Respondents feel that the Association should not only play a role in the monitoring and regulating but also contribute financially toward construction and maintenance of quality facilities. While this is a desirable goal, the Association currently has little or no funds to allocate to the construction and maintenance of facilities.

Twelve percent of the respondents indicated that they knew "nothing" about the Association with the majority of those expressing an interest in learning more.

### **Horse Industry Section of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development**

Respondents provided the following key areas within which the Horse Industry Section of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development ("HISA") could be and/or are of assistance. Specific themes were determined and analyzed based on the frequency reported. Six hundred and thirty-six comments were grouped into 10 distinct categories. They are listed in order of frequency reported:

#### **THE ROLE OF THE HORSE INDUSTRY SECTION**

(n=636 – Frequency of Selection)

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Information    | 40.4 |
| Education      | 20.0 |
| Promotion      | 10.5 |
| Don't Know     | 10.5 |
| Liaison        | 9.8  |
| Set Standards  | 7.3  |
| Funding        | 6.4  |
| Price controls | 3.7  |
| Web Site       | 3.0  |
| Facilities     | 1.4  |

Table 40. The Role of the Horse Industry Section, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

The HISA is primarily viewed as an informational and educational resource to horse owners in Alberta. Owners were satisfied with information they were provided when they had to contact the unit. They felt responses were timely and accurate. Three respondents felt that staffing needed to be improved.

Specifically, horse owners commented on feeding requirements, water programs, funding available, land available, services available, health issues and breeding. Educational needs could be met by providing a larger number of workshops, conferences and seminars directly related to business management, health issues, and marketing. Respondents suggested specifically more educational opportunities in Northern Alberta to match the effort that had already been expended in the southern half of the province.

The HISA's web site was seen as a useful tool; however, some respondents suggested that the site could be kept more current and more focused on horse related issues. It was also suggested that the site could be expanded to post products for sale or develop a registry for available pasture.

Nine point eight percent of owners believed that the HISA should be responsible for lobbying the local, provincial and federal governments to obtain tax incentives in order to keep the horse industry active and economically stable. Many individuals reported that the GST should not be applied to the sale of horses. It was perceived by some that the government is unaware of the importance of this industry and that the horse industry should be given the same respect, support and promotion that the cattle industry receives.

Horse industry standards were perceived as poorly regulated and that the HISA should play a more active role in setting and policing standards within the industry i.e. breeding, facilities, and setting price regulations for feed. It was also suggested that the HISA could be instrumental in developing a horse identification system.

Six point four percent of respondents believed that funding and subsidization should be provided to horse owners by the HISA in direct response to increases in feed, utility, and boarding costs.

Ten point five percent of respondents either did not know that the HISA existed or did not know what role it played within the horse industry

### **General Comments and Observations**

The majority (74.9%) of horse owners who took part in the Industry Profile and Economic Impact Survey reported that their primary reason for being in the horse industry was their love of horses and for recreational purposes. This is an expected result as 76% of horse owners reported being involved in the industry strictly for sport and recreation purposes (see Demographics). Many comments reflected the