

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

positive impact that owning a horse had on their lives and the belief that it was a healthy lifestyle choice. Some owners felt that their horse was their “companion and friend” and were not concerned about earning an income.

Horses are being used for wellness programs and activities by developing the skills of the disabled, stress relief, exercise, and mental health of individuals.

Business owners reported the following reasons for belonging to the equine industry:

- ◆ Breeding
- ◆ Breed extinction prevention
- ◆ Training
- ◆ Performing
- ◆ Competing
- ◆ Profit
- ◆ Investment
- ◆ Ranching
- ◆ Family tradition and inheriting operations were also reported.

Understanding the Alberta horse industry – Additional Comments. Respondents were asked for any additional comments that would enhance the understanding of the Alberta horse industry. The following individual comments from respondents were provided, analyzed and reported in theme areas:

Alberta horse owners believe there is a requirement to better communicate and involve owners with the Horse Industry Association of Alberta. The expectation of getting the results of this survey out to the intended public is very high. There were indications through the Horse Breeders Conference that the questionnaire was well received and informative. There is a perceived need for more funding and sources for equine facilities as well as more information/courses/seminars/workshops throughout Alberta. Owners remarked that they would like to be further involved in surveys and information gatherings.

There is a need to distribute information on associations affiliated with the horse industry. Alberta Horse Improvement classes for breeders were appreciated and recognized for assessing and marketing the breeder program.

Perhaps a blanket association for the horse industry could be created: what can the owners do to help and be involved? The concern is that they are currently not informed, thus, creating a vacuum.

Ethics need to be standardized. There needs to be direct input from the front line horse owners. Participants in the industry need to develop an organized Alberta group that would exist by consensually developed standards. The horse industry needs to be promoted with incentives. This should include government promotion of shows, events and sponsorships. The provincial magazine is beneficial to provide exposure to the horse industry. Horse owners should continue to have and express opinions on healthcare for horses. Standards should encourage controlled breeding, i.e., there is a concern on how PMU activities occur. Send more information to clubs like 4H so they are better informed. Alberta needs to catch up to world markets and marketing, and is perceived to be significantly behind.

“There needs to be increased power assigned to the ASPCA – promotion for care of abused and unwanted horses. Alberta horse breeds are advancing so quickly that there is neglect in health and care”.

Small horse owners have a concern they will be pushed out by big business i.e., PMU barns. Concern for publicity given to “drought victims” in Alberta, when in southern Alberta arid conditions are a way of life. No subsidies or free hay was offered to them. Assistance to make feed less expensive and more attainable would be well received in bad economical times.

A number of respondents echoed the following sentiments. There is no advertised direction to motivate the industry; equine maintenance is a long-term commitment before you can render any results. Many horse owners make major personal sacrifices to be part of the horse industry. Horses are seen as a luxury item; it’s a tough way to make a living. No one but the rich is able to afford horses because of exorbitant maintenance and health costs.

The horse industry linked with tourism has major economic potential. We must preserve our wilderness areas. Hikers and mountain bike riders need to be better informed about environmental and legal requirements and obligations. There are concerns for urban dwellers overtaking country folk style living with their fast-paced don’t care attitude that horse people have to go. Alberta needs more trail riding areas.

There is a lot of money tied up in horses and horse related requirements but very little money to be made in the horse business.

Horses are a very important part of keeping youth off the street and learning life long values, developing friendships and possibly becoming involved in a life-long career.

Youth could become involved in High School Rodeo as it is one of many excellent organizations. This helps interest the next generation, which ensures a prosperous future for this industry.

Alberta is well known for its horses and only getting better. Horse people are the most thoughtful people. I couldn't live without my horse and sport. These comments are all interrelated with horse owners and sustaining both the industrial and recreational aspects of the horse industry. Horses are a part of our heritage and a part of agriculture.

Knowledge/experience are being phased out by age i.e. farrier: There will be no ability to replace this type of expertise until we educate the public.