

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The role of the Association was defined as a primary source of current and valuable information in relationship to industry trends and concerns. Examples related to health related issues, breeding information, business and management advice, and upcoming events. This could be achieved through the publication of informational materials such as newsletters, brochures, books, videos and an interactive website. A provincial directory of important industry contacts was seen as being a necessity.

An interactive Web-site is recommended as another outreach process enabling horse owners to post sales of horses and merchandise as well as to provide online registries for such things as available pasture and industry services. Respondents also recommended that a *room* be made available to *ask the experts* and to receive comments and recommendations [emphasis added].

There is a need for increased and improved promotion of the horse industry, particularly business, along with the sport-recreation aspects.

The Association must act as an advocate and a liaison between the provincial and federal governments to ensure recognition, support, and subsidization for the horse industry.

The Association should play a role in the coordination of educational and informational events such as workshops, clinics, conferences, and seminars. Specific training programs such as trainer certification and breeder certification should be implemented and regulated by the Association. It was also recommended that the Association be instrumental in procuring more horse specific education in secondary institutions.

The Association should be instrumental in developing and implementing regulations in the areas of breeding, quality of facilities, land use (recreational and pasture management), and the importing and exporting of horses.

Too many governmental regulations were believed to be associated with land use and horse owners felt that the Association should advocate on their behalf, the increased use of public lands for recreational riding purposes and that there should be a restriction put on motorized vehicles.

Of the 12.0% of respondents who reported knowing nothing about the Association the majority expressed an interest in learning more. This could be achieved through publications and an active web site.

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

From this survey, there is a strong demand for the HISA to play a larger role in advocacy with the government. It is perceived that the government does not take the horse industry seriously and that intervention by HISA is required to equalize equity with the cattle industry. There is a need to provide the horse industry with a higher business profile and to decrease the image of sport-recreation.

HISA should also advocate with governments, locally, provincially and federally, for tax concessions, subsidization, and regulation of the horse industry. Areas perceived as requiring intervention included, withdrawal of GST on horses sold along with tax incentives and concessions (subsidization and price capping of hay and grain may be necessary) due to the substantial increase in the price and limited quantities of feed available due to the arid conditions.

HISA should monitor industry related products, merchandise suppliers and manufacturers to ensure fair and ethical pricing and practices in such areas as veterinary services/products, equipment suppliers, trailer suppliers, feed producers, etc.

There is a need for increased and improved promotion of the horse industry, particularly business, along with the sport-recreation aspects.

Education and information sharing is crucial for the success of the horse industry. There must be greater involvement by the HISA in the development and implementation of information resources. This is achievable through workshops, seminars, and/or conferences. Supplemental information should be provided through publications, books, videos and a current web site. Only a limited number of horse owners are aware of the HISA web-site, which may need a stronger horse component.

Some respondents reported having direct contact with HISA and believed that the Unit provided accurate and valuable information and felt that it was a positive and productive experience. Only a minimal number of respondents (10.5%) reported knowing nothing or very little about HISA and felt that HISA should promote themselves better through the development of a newsletter or brochure which could be regularly published and/or distributed on their web site. Another resource that would be beneficial to horse owners is an information publication which documents pertinent industry contacts containing names, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. Frequent comments and observations about the HISA held the staff in very high regard although they appeared short-staffed.

## **Promotion and Awareness of the Horse Industry**

It is perceived that the horse industry is seen as only a sport-recreation component of the agricultural agriculture industry. The majority of horse owners “love their horse” or view their horse as a “companion”, thus the community at large does not take the industry seriously. Some respondents reported that they believed poor promotion and lack of education contributed to this stigma. Some owners, although reporting only small numbers of horses, stated that they were a viable business and should be seen as such.

The HISA and the Association should play a larger role in improving and validating the image of the horse industry through both the coordination and implementation of promotional campaigns. They were also seen as financial contributors to this venture. Poor perceptions about the horse industry could be alleviated through active advertising campaigns that would incorporate various mediums such as television, radio, newsletters, and the promotion of an educational web site.

## **Education and Training Needs**

Ensuring the economic and environmental success of the horse industry is crucial. Respondents throughout this survey repeatedly reported the desire and need for education and training of horse owners and breeders. As is documented in other areas of this report, concerns were raised pertaining to the aging population of horse owners and it is believed that education and training must be available to the new generation. Those who are currently involved in the industry reported the need for upgrading in their business skills as they believed that the future outlook for the horse industry should include greater recognition for the industry as a business similar to cattle, from the public and the government, both provincially and federally. Specific areas which were identified, were as follows:

### **Breeding**

Horse owners are interested in information and education specifically related to breeding and selection. In order to remain competitive within the local, national and international markets, there must be specific information related to current and ongoing techniques and procedures.

### **Business**

Horse owners must improve their business management skills through courses that would be offered by the HISA to ensure they remain knowledgeable and up to date on current issues and business practices.

Owners must be made aware of the changing tax laws relating to the horse industry through tax courses.

### **Environmental**

Pasture management plays a vital role within the industry to ensure safe, effective and cost efficient practices. Issues reported by respondents raised concerns about overgrazing, poor soil quality, manure management, quality control and testing of feed and supplements. Education of horse owners is the recommended solution to environmental concerns.

### **Health**

Horse owners concerns were directly related to current health issues, the most notable at this time is the West Nile Virus. Proactive education and information is required by horse owners to determine the most effective practices for treating and eliminating illnesses to ensure that they do not reach epidemic proportions.

Respondents have had to supplement their feed requirements thus they require information about alternative feed products to ensure the good health and well being of their horses. Again, climate change and lower natural water supplies are lending themselves to poor quality feed and water, thus, leading to various health issues.

### **Training Skills**

Horse owners see the lack of education about training techniques and horsemanship directly contributing to the poor health and disposition of some animals to the point of bordering on abuse. Information and courses specifically targeting this issue are necessary.

Therapeutic industry training, information and education is required. Trainers and horses dealing specifically with disabled riders must be trained, skilled and certified to ensure the safety of the horse, rider and trainer.

All of the above-mentioned courses could be provided to horse owners and trainers, both on a business and sport-recreation level, through workshops, seminars, and/or conferences. Other viable means of distributing information are through publications, books, video and a current web site.

## **Government Intervention and Industry Regulations**

Horse owners believe government regulations must recognize the horse industry as a viable agricultural industry. This would allow the industry to receive the tax incentives and concessions that are perceived within the cattle industry. To accomplish this end, the Association needs to be more proactive in the political milieu.

Government regulations relating to riding trails throughout the province were seen as a major concern by horse owners. Public lands for riding around major cities are becoming scarce with the expansion of urban areas where, as noted by many of the respondents, city dwellers do not enjoy the smell of and waste produced by horses. Trails within mountain districts are also becoming less feasible since the introduction of ATV's, quads and hikers. It was felt that the horse industry is not strong enough to withstand lobbying by environmental groups and recreational groups (such as those that represent ATV's and hiker's). The horse industry must lobby the government to retain and maintain riding trails only for horses, not lose the trails that are utilized now. Ideally, many horse owners would prefer to see an increase in space, which is utilized for recreational riding purposes, without an exorbitant cost attached.

Cost control is a necessity in order to improve profitability within the industry. Due to the poor weather conditions (drought), the costs of feed, particularly hay and grain, prices have risen excessively. Notwithstanding that the arid conditions may or may not be a short run phenomena, the government and HISA must work in conjunction in order to develop and implement price regulations. They must also be more actively involved in researching and providing information on other sources of feed and grain. In the event that cost regulations could not be implemented, the government is seen as a source of financial subsidization during times of crises.

Veterinary services and supplies must also be regulated. This will ensure that costs remain affordable and supplies and medications are of a consistent and high quality. The availability of appropriate medications and vaccines needs to be monitored in order to ensure that supply and demand needs are met during times when specific diseases and viruses are prevalent.

Notwithstanding the fact that PMU producers are regulated, there is a perception that this is not the case. The PMU producers within Alberta require the continuous monitoring and regulation compliance that is in place to be more visible and transparent to the industry stakeholders. This will address concerns about the number of foals being introduced into the marketplace, which appears to adversely influence pricing and quality of horses. Questions were also raised about the quality of the horses being brought into the market and stakeholders believed that these breeding procedures should be monitored. The industry

needs to be more demonstrative and informative about the actual parameters of the PMU sector of the industry. This will go a considerable distance in reducing the criticism and skepticism that currently exists.

The various horse groups within the province must unite as one entity and present a unified solid group, to achieve this end. The horse industry within Alberta is too fragmented and disjointed with many self-interest groups as identified by many of the respondents in this survey.

### **Land Use and Management**

Effective land use is necessary to ensure the ongoing productivity of pasture/range land within Alberta to ensure that feed demands can be met through cost effective and environmentally friendly practices by immediate and future generations.

Overgrazing was a problem on some smaller acreages who own a large number of horses. The development of regulations that restrict the number of horses per acre is recommended as a solution to this issue.

Poor soil quality and manure management are part of the same issue. Lack of education and information about pasture management was seen as a contributor to poor quality of feed and reduced quantities. Improper manure disposal directly affects water supplies, weed control, quality of pasture/range land, and disease issues for both animals and owners. Regulations such as enforcing regular soil-testing for contaminants should be enforced. Also, education through courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, newsletters, books and publications are critical as a means to improve pasture management processes.