

# Horse Industry Profile and Economic Impact

## Survey

for

**Horse Industry Association of Alberta**



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TAR**  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Horse Industry Profile and Economic Impact Survey was commissioned by the Horse Industry Association of Alberta (the “Association”) to develop a profile of the horse industry and to assess selected economic components within the industry. Weststar Inc. completed the study, which yielded critical information to clarify the industry profile and economic processes therein.

Specifically, the objectives are:

- ◆ to develop a profile of the stakeholders within the equine industry in Alberta,
- ◆ to determine the economic practices and impacts of the equine industry in Alberta,
- ◆ to assess the stability and growth potential of the equine industry, and
- ◆ to identify the issues facing the industry and its stakeholders.

The questionnaire was composed of 57 questions which were developed and reviewed by Weststar's consultants, the Horse Industry Section, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and the Board of Directors of the Horse Association of Alberta. The questionnaires sought both quantitative and qualitative data. Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment and respond to open ended questions.

The initial mailing consisted of 6,100 surveys of which 1,793 individuals returned completed surveys. Quantitative data was computerized, while qualitative information was assembled and theme analyzed. All data and information was analyzed, conclusions drawn, recommendations developed.

Demographics reported include gender, age distribution, family income, respondent location, vested interests, perspectives and participation and will provide the reader with a sense of the overall nature of participation within the horse industry throughout the province.

Participants were predominantly sport-recreation (68.2%), breeding (46.5%) and trail rides (43.6%). Other sectors within the equine industry included working cow/horse, coaching/lessons, gymkhanas, racing, riding camps/trail rides/packing in mountains, administration, veterinarians, farriers, editorials and the insurance end of the horse industry. The variety of responses indicated strong diversity within the industry.

The economic section of the survey determined that the horse industry within Alberta is a viable, vibrant industry utilizing a wide diversity of individuals ranging from businesses, to horse owners, to farriers, to

the insurance sector of the industry. The majority of stakeholders reported that to purchase and maintain their horse(s) required substantial amounts of time, energy and dollars.

The horse industry within Alberta reported that the “business” aspect of the horse industry employed a wide diversity of experienced, well trained individuals in the areas of breeding, PMU operations, meat production operations, racing/showing, training/coaching, stablehands, etc.

The marketing component of this report addresses the areas of age, breed and volume of horses sold, methods of and dollars used for the purchasing and selling of horses, reasons and methods for disposing of unwanted horses and identification of new or replacement stock. The top five purchasing methods most preferred were breeders as number one, friends/acquaintances as number two, newspapers as number three, website as number four, and private contract as number five while the top five disposition methods were private as number one, friends/acquaintances as number two, breeders as number three, auctions as number four, and brokers/sales agents as number five. The average purchase price was \$3,902 with the average sale price being \$3,756, while the average value of a horse was determined to be \$4,267.

Horse owners were surveyed to determine if they used their horses for breeding purposes. Nearly one half of owners (45.2%) reported not being involved in breeding while 54.8% used their stock for reproduction purposes. This area also addresses primary breeds, methods of breeding and acquisition of semen.

Unwanted horses are primarily disposed of through meat markets and euthanasia. Some owners reported keeping their animals until their horses passed away.

Major health issues identified by participants through open-ended questions were ranked and included areas such as West Nile Virus and the effects of limited and poor water quality.

Pasture management and all that it entails, is an ongoing concern for the majority of respondents. The issues of management includes such areas as feed, pasture usage, public lands, grazing lands, manure waste management, bedding and water. Based on the frequency reported, 78.6% of horse owners reported adding supplements to their feed. Owners have consistently reported that due to poor weather conditions, there is a feed shortage and poor quality in the hay and grain available.

Environmental issues are becoming more and more the norm for stakeholders, some of who have taken it upon themselves to develop and maintain some type of program to protect their horses and the environment. In response to open ended questions relating to the environment, the majority of

respondents reported that more attention should be paid to issues ranging from how to maintain a herd through drought conditions, to pasture management, to feed related problems (i.e., lack of feed, poor quality of feed, cost of feed), to diseases and pollution.

Forty six point seven percent of respondents file an income tax return related to their business activities. Those who do not file are primarily sport-recreation owners who do not feel that their activities fall under the *Income Tax Act*.

Some of the significant recommendations related to the Horse Industry Association of Alberta (the “Association”) include the definition of their role particularly attached to the provision of information to industry stakeholders, relating to current issues and concerns in areas such as health, breeding, management, and events. The Association is encouraged to adopt a more proactive and dynamic role in lobbying the government(s) on behalf of constituents of the industry. Another key recommendation lies in the need for the Association to take a leadership role in educating both the members of the industry as well as the general public. A final recommendation lies in the need for the Association to become involved in an advocacy role in the development and possible compliance of sound practices and processes, as well as regulations.

The second area of recommendations relates to the Horse Industry Section of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (the “HISA”). This section plays a critical role in harmonizing many of the activities of the industry including problem solving and information dissemination. Some of the recommendations to be considered include playing a stronger role in the advocacy between the industry and various levels of government. The HISA should also consider expanding the nature of their communication process and techniques.

There is a perception that the sport-recreation component of the industry has garnered a favourable image in the eyes of the public. It is suggested that promotional activities be considered to dramatize and inform the general public about the essence of the other components of the horse industry.

In relation to the need for enhanced education and training needs, a number of key areas have been identified including: breeding, business management, environment, health, and training skills. In addition, partnerships with other associations to undertake an in-depth needs analysis and delivery methods would be advantageous and beneficial.

The last two areas of recommendations lie in government intervention and regulations, and land use and management. It is recommended that in both areas, the Association, the HISA and other stakeholders explore ways and means to address the concerns and needs of the horse industry.

The survey's findings represent concerns and issues raised by individuals involved within the horse industry who are faced with numerous challenges on a daily basis. Respondents were able to provide additional comments throughout the survey. Reasons for being involved in the horse industry were regularly reported as "I love my horse" and "my horse is my companion".

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There were many contributors and supporters involved in the successful completion of the **Horse Industry Profile and Economic Impact Survey**. Weststar's research team wishes to acknowledge and thank the many thousands of people and organizations who made it all possible.

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Finally, we would like to thank Mr. Pete Fraser, President, Horse Industry Association of Alberta for his generous support and assistance throughout the study.

Again, thank you to all of you.

Rob Gawreluck, PhD.  
President  
**Weststar Inc.**