



What about Horses?

If you're like most people, you have a very specific memory about a horse – riding recklessly bareback when you were a kid, falling off and getting back on (or not), riding the “old nag” that belonged to a friend of your mom, or taking lessons at a stable on horses that knew how long the lesson time was and wouldn't work a moment longer! You probably even remember the horse's name and, for better or worse, it has probably shaped how you feel about them even to this day. You have the feelings you have about horses because they are big, beautiful, romanticized, clearly not a dog or cat, and seemingly inaccessible. Without some exposure around horses, it can be hard to read their body language or understand their behavior.

But there is no doubt that horses hold incredible appeal to a wide population of people; and those people participate in a variety of activities: western pleasure, reining, English, Dressage, lessons, pony rides, hay rides, carriage driving, special needs riding, horse shows, trick training, riding games, horses for rescue, horses for sale, cattle sorting and team penning, racing, and the most fundamental, trail riding. With a simple search on the internet you can find boarding stables, farriers (hoof care specialists), riding lessons, trail rides, training clinics, horse clubs, horse art, expos ... and the list goes on.

According to the Minnesota Horse Council and the University of Minnesota's Journal of Extension, it has been estimated that Minnesota's horse industry generates nearly \$1 billion in economic activity annually! The 2002 USDA Census of Agriculture indicated there were 14,289 horse and pony farms in Minnesota, up 80% from the 1997 census, and 92,770 horses and ponies, up 75% from 1997 (USDA/NASS, 2002). A reasonable conclusion drawn from those statistics indicates horses are an integral

part of our Minnesota landscape. As populated neighborhoods creep out from the city, the horse pastures have moved further out and we just don't see them as we pass in our regular travels, but they are still there – in large herds that roam acres of property in rural areas and also nestled in hobby farm backyards, a couple horses at a time.

The people who are interested and active in the horse industry spend money in large amounts, supporting many industries – agricultural farms who grow hay, corn and oats, feed mills that process grain-based feeds or hay cubes; veterinarians whose clinics include large animal care, providing routine vaccinations and emergency services; shops that sell tack needed for riding, such as helmets, saddles, pads, bridles and bits; clothing stores that carry riding boots and apparel; retailers that carry how-to books and informational or training videos and DVDs, not to mention the sales of trucks and trailers.

An article, written by the University of Minnesota's Brian Buhr (Department of Applied Economics, "Economic Value of Horses in Minnesota"), made important observations: horse activities promote youth education and responsibility, they build communities through associations, and support the agricultural infrastructure.

Those with horses in their lives, in whatever way, acknowledge that they are a life-long passion. With Minnesota's rich and diverse horse opportunities, any one on any level can find a way to enjoy horses, at arm's length or under saddle. This summer, be a part of the excitement and create some new horse memories of your own!