

HORSES ARE IMPORTANT TO ECONOMY

A study of American history reveals that horses and mules were essential to our development as a nation. Not only were these hardy animals the major mode of transportation, they also did the majority of the heavy work and assisted sturdy men and women who labored at their sides. The stage coach and the pony express were forerunners of horse-drawn freight lines, delivery wagons and spring buggies. Horses and mules were also used extensively on farms, in mines and forests, and in building roads and railroads that were eventually used by automobiles and trains. The term “horse power” is a reminder of horses’ ability to perform hard work, day after day, in a variety of conditions. Few would argue the significant contributions equine have made to our collective national achievements.

Two types of horses became common in use. Draft horses and large mules were used in pulling heavy loads and light horses were bred for riding and carriage use. Most communities had livery stables, like modern rental car businesses, where travelers could hire horses and carriages or stable their own horses overnight. Specific breeds have been developed over time, and well managed breed associations continue to be important in promoting the unique characteristics of each kind. Even today, most horse owners are rather passionate about the characteristics and qualities of their “chosen breed”.

The introduction of the automobile in the early 1900’s and the use of tractors shortly thereafter minimized the need for horses. From 1920 to 1960 horse numbers declined and the number of automobiles and tractors continued to increase. The U. S. Agricultural Census discontinued reporting horse numbers in 1961, though some effort has been made to estimate total horse populations since then. Since the majority of today’s horses are used for pleasure and not for production (like cows), it has proven difficult to obtain accurate numbers of horses, mules and ponies.

There appears to be ample evidence that Utah horse numbers have steadily increased during the past two or three decades. A “windshield survey” while driving in the County or State shows a multitude of horses in pastures and paddocks. Information gleaned from a 1994 Utah State University study showed that horses continue to be important to Utah families. Questionnaires distributed to 2,500 Utah residents showed that most horse owners are located along the Wasatch Front where the majority of Utah’s population is located. More than 60 percent of the horses were owned by people who live in Salt Lake, Utah, Weber, Davis, Cache and Box Elder Counties. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents to the survey indicated they had horses for “family pleasure”.

Since most Utah horses are used for pleasure, their individual economic impact is quite small. Collectively, however, the revenue from associated services is measured in the millions of dollars. Horse owners buy feed, veterinary care, farrier services, trucks and trailers, pay for boarding, equipment and tack. Lots of clothing is also sold to horse owners. Even folks who don’t own a horse often want to appear to be cowboys or cowgirls. Other horse related income is generated from horse shows, racing, breed fees

and competitive horse events. Horses continue to have a significant impact on the economy of Utah.

Knowing how important the horse industry is to our state, USU Extension and the Animal, Dairy and Veterinary Sciences Department at USU organized the Equine Teaching and Extension Team. This team, consisting of Dr. Patricia Evans, Scott McKendrick and Annie McAsey, has been working together for almost two years. Equine classes and curriculum for University students has been expanded and a renewed commitment to the Utah Horse Industry has been solidified. A massive amount of information is listed at their website <http://extension.usu.edu/cooperative/equine> including events and links to related sites. The 4-H Horse website <http://utah4horse.org> is another site that is easily accessed to keep current with the latest information for 4-H horse club members and leaders.

The Utah Horse Council is one organization that works closely with the USU Equine Team. A recent news release announcing Utah Horse Expo 2006 shows evidence of a cooperative effort to identify needs of the horse industry and to organize programs to meet those needs. The Expo is scheduled for March 10, 11, 12 and will be held at the Salt Lake County Equestrian Park in South Jordan. The event is for horse lovers of all ages and will feature educational seminars and workshops from beginner to advanced. This years Expo will feature master trainers, Ken McNabb and Richard Shrake, who are among the best horse trainers in the world. The Expo also features large commercial displays and exhibits with the latest in tack, trappings, medical, nutritional and equipment products. Tickets are available only at the door ranging in price from \$3.00 to \$6.00. Merl Thurgood, Chairman of the Utah Horse Council (801-510-3313) or Scott McKendrick, USU Extension Equine Team may be contacted with additional questions. Interested parties may also visit <http://utahhorsecouncil.org>.