



MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

ACTION PLAN

in response to the

2009 MARYLAND HORSE FORUM

November 17, 2009



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INTRODUCTION

The Maryland Horse Forum was an opportunity for all Maryland horse people to speak up with ideas for the health and growth of our industry. It was organized by the Maryland Horse Industry Board, which is our “commodity group” within the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The Forum Report is a compilation of the comments and suggestions that were heard at the Forum and can be downloaded online at www.marylandhorseindustry.org.

The Maryland Horse Council is the organization that represents 30,000 horse people, some directly as individual, farm, or business members, and others through association membership. The Horse Council operates outside of government and makes decisions democratically through an elected board of directors. It has represented the interests of Maryland’s diverse equestrian community since 1983.

After the 2009 Horse Forum the Horse Council Board of Directors met in Frederick to review how our agenda matched up with the ideas presented at the Forum. From that meeting and subsequent discussion among the leadership, the following Action Plan has been drafted to guide our policy work in the years to come. Some categories reflect the breakout sessions at the Forum, while others are Horse Council priorities that command special attention. This is a work in progress. It needs your input.

STATEWIDE MARKETING INITIATIVE

When the MHC lobbied the legislature to create the MHIB in 1998, a primary goal was marketing our industry to the public. A robust and creative discussion of marketing took place at the Forum in a packed breakout session that happened to include some of our state’s most talented and experienced professionals in this area. The session was moderated by the state’s new director of the Office of Sports Marketing, whose previous job was helping secure the 2010 World Equestrian Games for the state of Kentucky.

At the MHC meeting two weeks later, Maryland horsewoman and marketing consultant Ellie Trueman presented a plan to develop a statewide marketing project. Ellie’s list of past clients includes the American Horse Shows Association, Dover Saddlery, Ariat, and many others in our industry. She and Maryland Life Magazine publisher Ross Peddicord, who is also the incoming chair of the Maryland Board of Tourism and was the Baltimore Sun’s horse racing reporter, convened a small group of people to begin this process immediately. In addition to Ellie and Ross, the initial group includes Equiery publisher Crystal Kimball, MHIB Executive Director Rob Burk, consultant to MD Jockey Club for Preakness marketing Karen DeFrancis, Maryland Horse Council President Steuart Pittman, Annapolis Mayor Ellen Moyer, and Joint Master of the Marlborough Hunt Club Christy Clagget.

The group’s initial set of proposals will be presented to the Horse Council at a future meeting and to the MHIB Board. If and when the plan generates support in the industry the Horse Council will work with the marketing committee to raise public and private funding for

implementation. Anyone with ideas to lend to this process should contact Ellie at tcgemt@aol.com.

PROMOTE RACING AND IMPLEMENT SLOTS

The Horse Council worked hard to encourage the non-racing equestrian community to vote YES on the slots initiative last fall. Our membership includes the racing and non-racing sectors, but we tend to leave the promotion of racing to the organizations that represent the racing industry. In this time of transition and opportunity, however, this part of our industry needs our active support.

At the MHC Board Meeting after the Forum we discussed the need to bring non-racing horse people to the tracks and explored the possibility of a Maryland Horse Council “Day at the Races,” including an educational tour of the backstretch. Such an effort will require a committee of ambitious volunteers and has not yet been planned. Anyone interested in helping to organize such an event should contact MHC Secretary Christine Bricker (christine.bricker@ngc.com), who represents the Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen’s Association.

As events unfold with respect to new ownership of Maryland tracks and implementation of slots, the Horse Council will keep its members informed and mobilize in support of racing when needed.

ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF UNWANTED HORSES

MHC will continue to encourage the participation of horse rescues and placement organizations in our work and continue to encourage the fledgling group called Maryland Association of Rescues and Equine Sanctuaries (MARES). We will also continue to attempt to monitor the problem of the high cost of euthanasia and disposal and act to solve it when a proposal is set forth that our membership supports.

As a member of the American Horse Council and of its State Horse Council Advisory Committee, we will support the work of its new Unwanted Horse Coalition. We will also lobby Congress to include the GAO study of the effect of the slaughter ban on the problem of unwanted horses in the appropriations bill for agriculture. Anyone interested in getting involved in our work in this area should contact Amy Burk (amyburk@umd.edu) and participate in the MHC Health and Welfare Committee.

PROTECTING THE BAY AND GOING GREEN

MHC recognizes that a major incentive for public officials to support the preservation of horse farms is that well managed pastures and hay fields are excellent filters of the chemicals that enter our waterways. We have a natural political alliance with the powerful environmental

groups in our state, but we can only win their support for what we do if we work hard to educate our people to implement best farm management practices.

MHC will support efforts by Soil Conservation to fund Environmental Quality Incentives Program projects on horse farms. We will also support and publicize current research by the University of Maryland in the area of pasture management and erosion control. Both our trails and greenways and our farm preservation efforts will also contribute to our role in maintaining open space and promoting responsible environmental stewardship.

ZONING, LAND USE, AND “SAVE THE HORSE FARMS”

The Horse Council wrote and passed state legislation (HB 955) in 2009 stating that equestrian activities done on horse farms are agriculture. With this new law demonstrating the intent of the legislature we believe that now is the time to take our case to the county level.

Many counties do not recognize what we do on horse farms as agriculture, and as a result our farms struggle with a variety of restrictions. The effect of squeezing our farms out of business is less open space for the communities around us.

A major focus of the MHC Legislative Committee in 2010 will be a new **Save The Horse Farms Campaign**. We are enlisting volunteers from each county to help gather stories about the effect of county regulations on horse farms, as well as to gather local ordinances and recruit local committees who want to work for reform at the county level.

The committee has outlined the following objectives for this initiative.

- Draft a detailed survey to inquire into individual farm owners’ experience with county level governmental entities and issues with any specific zoning ordinances
- Name County Coordinator and create County Committees
 - Collect and organize data from farm owners, county council, and county park and planning entities
 - Collection of relevant zoning ordinance language
 - Collection of case history of farms having specific issues with governmental entities
 - Collection of data on horse farms, non-horse farms, and use of open space at the county level
 - Collection of data on grain/hay farms that have now been sold for development purposes
- Review of federal and other legislation to protect and preserve horse farms
 - Kentucky
 - Washington State
 - New York
- Review of federal and state level legislation for agricultural and open space preservation
- Draft and Release Report
- Implement legislative objective arising from the data collection at the state and local levels

Anyone interested in sharing experiences for this effort or in becoming involved in any way should contact Amy Kregel Samman at ajk@FDALAW.com.

WORK FORCE AND MHC BUSINESS NETWORK

MHC has held two well-attended Business Seminars, the first of which specifically addressed labor and work force issues. As a result of the success of this kind of education and networking we will soon be introducing the **MHC Business Network** as a way for farm and business members of MHC to meet regularly, share concerns, identify regulatory and legislative issues, and to educate one another. The first meeting of this group will take place on December 1 at 3pm at Reddemeade Farm in Silver Spring and is open to any interested Farm or Business member of MHC. Contact Jane Siegler (jane@reddemeade.com) or Crytal Kimball (crystaleq@rcn.com) with any questions about this new initiative.

MHC's participation in the American Horse Council provides us with regular updates on federal legislation and regulation pertaining to foreign workers and federal tax and employment law. We pass on that information when appropriate and encourage our members to contact their Senators and Congressmen when our interests require it.

MHC has a close relationship with the University of Maryland equine programs and will continue to encourage our members to cooperate with them in efforts to educate our future workforce and hire graduates.

MAINTAINING, EXPANDING, AND IMPROVING TRAILS

MHC has maintained for years an active Trails and Greenways committee and has had as an important association member Trail Riders of Today (TROT). In September 2009 we merged the two. TROT has in effect become our Trails and Greenways Committee, and its chair, Ron MacNab, has been appointed as an ex-officio member of the MHC Executive Committee to ensure that trail riders' issues are kept at the forefront of the MHC agenda. Anyone interested in improving, preserving, and opening up new trails and rights of way for riding should contact Ron MacNab at rmacnab@comcast.net.

HORSE PARK AND COMPETITION VENUE SUPPORT

The momentum from the Forum provides the opportunity to refocus on the need for a state horse park and infrastructure improvements at existing venues. We have data from the 2007 horse park feasibility study that demonstrates the economic benefits to the state of such an investment, and we have the governor's attention.

The Horse Council will encourage and support the MD Horse Industry Board (MHIB) as it works to create and fund a program to direct investment to existing competition venues, and as it undertakes a renewed effort to identify a new site for a state horse park. When specific plans are in place for both we intend to mobilize a grass roots campaign in support of funding and implementation at all levels of government.

LIVESTOCK IMPORT / EXPORT FACILITY

While the passion within our membership for an import/export facility is not as high as for competition venues and a horse park, we recognize the benefits that such a facility would bring to Maryland and to our industry. The MHIB-supervised feasibility study that was released in June 2008 laid out a model for how such a facility would be structured near BWI Airport, and how the state would benefit. The Horse Council will organize support behind this project at the time when the MHIB believes that the critical players can be brought on board. The feasibility study can be viewed online at www.marylandhorseindustry.org.

INSURANCE ISSUES

Over the years MHC has debated internally whether horse farms are better protected by our state's existing contributory negligence law or whether we should introduce an equine limited liability law similar to those found in other states. Some lawyers have argued that Maryland's requirement that a litigant must show that they did not contribute to the cause of an accident is good protection for horse farms, because the fact that a person has chosen to participate in equestrian activities is itself a contribution to the danger. MHC will continue to listen to all sides of this debate and be prepared to move forward on new state legislation if a consensus emerges that it benefits our industry.

Another means of reducing insurance rates for our industry is to demonstrate to insurers that risks are lower than they believe them to be. MHC currently has an online survey underway of experiences with workplace accidents. Our intent is to use the results to determine whether our industry is being overcharged for workers compensation insurance. The survey can be found at www.mdhorsecouncil.org until November 30.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Many of the issues that were raised at the Horse Forum have legislative solutions, whether at the county, state, or federal level. MHC has always maintained an active legislative committee and at times hired lobbyists to pass specific bills.

We are currently in the process of growing our legislative committee under the leadership of our new chair, Amy Kregel Samman. Amy and other committee members happen to be registered lobbyists and know Annapolis well, but our power to pass laws has always been a function of our grass roots strength. The primary function of our legislative committee is to

mobilize our full membership behind our agenda, and to ensure that our proposals are presented clearly and with political skill.

Knowing our elected representatives at all levels of government, and making sure that they know us, is an ongoing task irrespective of our issues. We invite legislators to our annual meeting in Annapolis and expect to have more opportunities to interact with them in the future.

Anyone interested in serving on this committee should contact Amy at aks@fdalaw.com.

THE MHIB FEED FUND

In the 2009 legislative session the Horse Council lobbied for and passed HB 973, which increases what we all pay as an assessment on horse feed to an average of \$3 per horse per year. That means that MHIB will have some \$215,000 per year to spend on programs to benefit the industry, rather than the \$75,000 available in recent years. The first project planned with the increased money is an update of the 2002 Equine Census. Data collection will begin in the spring, with results to be made available in the fall of 2010.

The Maryland Horse Council will monitor the spending of feed fund dollars and make recommendations to the MHIB board on where to direct the funds. Anyone with comments or ideas on this subject should email the horse council at admin@mdhorsecouncil.org or can contact MHIB directly at info@marylandhorseindustry.org.

THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Governor O'Malley spent a great deal of time at the Forum, expressed interest in some of our ideas, and showed that he understands the importance of the horse industry in Maryland. The next day his office put out press statements about the event and even scheduled an August 27 visit to the Dawson's Fairwinds Farm in Cecil County for his "Capital for a Day" cabinet meeting where he rode a horse in his business suit a bit farther and longer than his security detail felt comfortable with.

Maintaining a good working relationship with the Governor's Office is critical to moving forward on many of our issues. MHC will work hard to cultivate this relationship and extend it to the various departments of state government.

MHC COMMUNICATIONS

None of the plans in this document can be implemented effectively without an up-to-date set of practices for communication and outreach within our community and our organization. Toward this end we have hired as our new administrator Margaret Rizzo and her company Mythic Landing Events. She is working with the executive committee, her staff, and staff at the

Equiery to update www.mdhorsecouncil.org, to establish an online dues payment option, and to expand our use of Constant Contact and other services for newsletters, meeting notices, member and board opinion surveys, and grassroots lobbying.

MHC member Carolyn DeGrosso has recently come on board as the new MHC Bookkeeper. She will integrate the finances electronically with the online services and ensure that the growth of the organization is fiscally monitored.

MHC AND ITS ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

The Horse Council's association members represent a huge source of the organization's potential power. As we undertake the plans in this document a renewed effort will be made to inform and enlist the help of these organizations. We will request that their newsletters and websites include regular MHC updates, and we will ask all associations to help as we encourage greater activism on legislative and policy issues by their members.