

University of Guelph Equine Industry Symposium

Breakout Sessions Executive Summary
November 18, 2016

Executive Summary – Breakout Sessions

During the afternoon at the Equine Symposium on November 19th, 2016, breakout groups discussed themes identified in the morning session. This summary presents the core conversations and next step suggestions captured at each of the six breakout tables.

Table 1 – Marketing and Outreach

We know not everyone is involved “hands-on” with the horse; many people have other types of potential horse industry engagement. How do we get them involved, and who takes on this role? What can be done to showcase/promote horses and the industry, and to broaden participants’ buy-in and understanding of the efforts made to move the industry forward? This table will look outside the industry to increase engagement of members of the non-horse community.

CONVERSATION SUMMARY

- Equine Guelph shared some of their success stories. “Equimania”, for example, which directs children and families to riding facilities in their areas.
- Demographic challenges are substantial. The industry is perceived as being dominated by females, and young males are not attracted to it. Young boys may be deterred from riding, perhaps from fear of bullying by contemporaries. In therapeutic and endurance riding there is more of a mixed gender presence.
- There is a challenge of perception, exemplified by the limited coverage of Olympic equine events. The prevalent thought is that riding is only for ‘the rich’. A lack of access to the sport for youth coming from families that do not own horses similarly reinforces this perception of the industry. The group understands that a more diverse marketing strategy is required:
 - Many barns struggle with how to market themselves to their local community. Exposing the community to the opportunities on a broader scale is needed (through local newspapers, going to craft shows, for example).
 - Sometimes the difficulty is accessibility - physically connecting to a place where a person can engage with horses. Community carpools and offering group discounts to attract the urban population should be considered.

NEXT STEPS

- Provincial equine federations need to become engaged. A mandate to be an ambassador to promote the industry (in schools, for example), could be built into certification.
- Equestrian Canada could encourage this with the new governance process and promote engagement at the grassroots level. Equestrian Canada has focused on competition in the past. *[Such an activity may be specifically proscribed by EC’s new mandate under Sport Canada’s rules.]*
- We need to be getting into the schools, through on-line education, for example. Connect with the industry. There are programs such as ParticipAction and Canadian Tire family programs that we could tap into.
- Get horses out into the community to give them more visibility.
- Engage the University community with the programs that are already active.

Table 2 – The Disconnect

How can the industry better make connections between passionate young people and promising careers? How can the industry better promote careers in the administrative/management/services side of the industry to young people, and better retain these passionate folks who are not seeing a future for themselves in the equine sector?

CONVERSATION SUMMARY

- Two employment sectors are seen in the equine industry: barn owners/horse care, and service providers.

Barriers to barn owners

- The shared thought is that many barn owners “can’t find people”, but these owners’ expectations are often viewed as unreasonable. The hours are very long and the pay is too low (especially once true hours are considered). Pay is sometimes so low that staff can’t feed themselves properly, and become ill and unable to work at all. There is a notion of being burnt out paired with a sentiment that entrepreneurship is not a reasonable option for youth (due to high costs and overhead).

Barriers in the services sector

- The University is not contacting firms about hiring graduates of the BBRM program. Mid-size companies do not have dedicated HR staff. Paired together, these factors make it harder for students to ‘bang on the door’ and get a job.
- Since many successful members of the industry are not formally educated in equine studies themselves, there is a perception that education may not be valued. The general feeling is that this will eventually change.
- The industry lacks awareness of the BBRM program and what its graduates bring to the table.

NEXT STEPS

- University of Guelph, BBRM program:
 - The University CECS – Cooperative Education and Career Services - could connect companies with students/graduates.
 - The program or Department could connect companies with students/graduates.
 - Consider internships/co-ops. (Some businesses have found four months is just long enough to train students, who then leave).
- There is a perception in the industry that graduates could be book-smart without having any experience (a challenge with any degree program). A co-op program could help dispel this perception.
 - Facilitate some kind of ‘job board’:
 - Cooperative Education and Career Services at the University of Guelph would need to be involved, as they have the technical expertise and industry connections to effectively assist with this effort.
 - A reliable funding model is needed to ensure sustainability.
- The BBRM program could improve its business management skills offerings. These skills are in high demand.

- For example, for a class, have BBRM students go into an operation, evaluate it, and make suggestions for improving the business. The challenge here would be that equine businesses are not overly receptive to this idea. The dairy sector has been more open to this recently.
- BBRM program could allow more flexibility, e.g., allow students to pursue a minor that would help them in their career (e.g., journalism). (Cannot do minors at present.)

Table 3 – Industry Standard

Where are the benefits and drawbacks of regulation, certification, and language? What are the impacts? What are ideas moving forward around Therapeutic Riding/Coaching etc. Come to this table to put forward new ideas about this timely issue.

CONVERSATION

- The equine industry is impacted by a lack of industry standards related to service providers, including coaches, trainers and owners or operators of equine farms. Presented are the benefits, drawbacks and themes which emerged:

Benefits

Clarity
 Horse welfare
 Safety for riders
 Professionalism
 Improved communication with consumers
 Peer support and unity within the industry
 National scope brings consistency
 Audits bring validity
 Consistent minimum knowledge expectations
 Accreditation of training programs

Drawbacks

Costs associated with training/regulation
 Who controls regulation?
 Management of regulations
 Potential increase in service costs
 Implementation could take a long time
 Lack of government funding
 Government interference when setting standards
 Fears associated with lack of certification
 Misinformed consumers
 Difficulty working with a fractured industry

- Accreditation needs to be compulsory and existing providers should be given a date by which time they must be certified. If providers fail to acquire the mandatory training/certification, they would go from professional status to provisional status. Current professionals could be grandfathered based on existing credentials/certifications. Required training standards would break down the respect barriers within the industry. These standards must be determined internally before they are proposed to external audiences (e.g. government organizations, consumers), and common language must be used throughout. While certification requirements will cost providers, this will also improve their status and may allow them to charge more for their services. Consider looking at the European examples.
- Consumer education is valuable, they should understand the competencies of their service provider. Peer support is also critical. Currently, the industry lacks respect between participants/organizations but minimum standards could become the cohesive piece. Existing organizations could initially contribute \$100,000 to get the initiative started – this will show unity amongst all organizations, provide clarity across sectors and create a fair and balanced perspective.

NEXT STEPS

- Standards must be set for all service providers, which will provide consumers with confidence in the industry; all service providers should have training from an accredited program:
 - Minimum standards for care and treatment of horses will improve their welfare.
 - The objective of these standards will be to raise the bar for the industry, nationally.
 - Most companies/sports belong to American organizations because we lack Canadian standards.
 - Existing organizations are branded and fail to see beyond this branding or the need for a more Canada-centered brand.
 - A national organization that oversees the minimum industry standards is necessary, but who will fund this umbrella organization and guarantee that this funding remains?
 - Service providers must be audited to ensure compliance with standards – auditors could represent a new, non-profit organization that acts independently of the industry and follows a formal audit process (previously this was done by OMAFRA before budget cuts).
 - Minimum standards must include the following:
 - Safety standards
 - Certified industry trainers
 - A code of practice/ethics for all service providers

Table 4 – Silos

What can the industry do to become more cohesive Come here to discuss how to form strategic partnerships – how do we move forward, together? An idea for a National Forum for the Horse was brought up. What can that national body look like? Come here to share your ideas.

CONVERSATION

- We live in an “achievement culture” and this is our cultural silo. There is a division between high equine performance and our foundational relationship with the horse.
 - This “silo” corrupts the incentive to educate students properly, to provide an education based on values rather than competition.
- There is a “territoriality” and “protectionist instinct” that follows each specialty/discipline all the way to the top.
 - Within the silos of protectionism, we are all “swimming in the same small pond”, and this prevents interaction instead of fostering it.
- Silos in the industry are easy to identify and span a variety of areas. Some named in this conversation included particular ways of viewing horses and our equine activities based on: disciplines, breeds, tribalism, performance, English vs, Western, defining knowledge basics, communication strategies, messaging, grass roots approaches, education, and levels of awareness. It was observed that values form our actions and actions form our future, and that we need to change the dialogue.
 - Breaking down these silos is beneficial to the industry’s future.

NEXT STEPS

- There is an overall focus on performance in the equine industry, but what is needed is a common focus. People are the dividers, not the horse. People are often starting out as specialists, when people should start out at a baseline—a unifying foundation of care. We need to “get back to the basics” in order to help ourselves escape from this tribalism.

- There is not enough focus on FUN. Fun keeps you involved in the industry and encourages new members.
 - Fun/general involvement vs. controlled environment must be increased
 - When a new member of the community shows an interest in horses, the narrative should be: “Go have fun first and then perhaps narrow your focus in on important issues.”
- Our growth with the horse and in the industry is based on our foundational connection with the horse, but we are removed from the horse. Horses are off people’s radar
 - In the silos, coaches say “it is my way or the highway”; this needs to change.
- Horses need to be more accessible: first as simply an animal, and then with information/sources, and then job opportunities. There are elitist viewpoints that see the horse as “just a tool”, but we need a progressive re-definition of the industry”.
 - Foundational interest in the horse = baseline connection to the horse
 - We need to get back to values/roots of empathy.

Table 5 – Youth

We recognize the style of engagement seen by youth is changing. We come from an industry where members once gave back to the program, but this is no longer happening. This table will discuss what can be done to think creatively about this obstacle.

CONVERSATION

- A concerted partnership with everyone in the industry is needed to push promotion of involvement with horses to youth, but there needs to be visible exposure. Examples of this kind of exposure can be found in other sports – women’s hockey has been wildly successful given its increased exposure. Until there is a unifying body that is willing to state explicitly that youth engagement is a priority and to standardize the effort, there will be no substantial progress in this regard. Racetracks present an opportunity to engage youth in larger numbers.
- Educating parents is a valuable tool for attracting youth. Parents want to feel comfortable with their children’s involvement, and standards within the industry can help. Because many parents don’t come into contact with horses, they might not think of engaging their children. Examples of how industry is reaching out and becoming more visible include the presence of U of G Equine Programs at the CNE and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, creating exposure amongst individuals, and ‘Horsepower’ by Ross Miller.
- Accessibility is a central issue for youth involvement. Using pre-existing equine-related youth programs such as 4H Club, “Ticket to Ride”, and Pony Club is important for ongoing sustainability of the equine industry.

NEXT STEPS

- School horses need to be accessible to provide opportunities to kids at an affordable rate. For example, “Horses in the Classroom” is a program that can be used to expose students to horses in the school setting.
- The University of Guelph is on the verge of revealing a new online portal – kids are provided with the opportunity to engage with online modules, increasing their knowledge base and allowing them an accessible option for engagement.
- There needs to be less competition and more fun for youth in equine activities. There needs to be more media coverage of equine related activities so youth can picture themselves being involved.
- Using interactive technology to engage youth with horses is a timely idea. Apps, while expensive, may provide an opportunity to interact with the industry. Much progress

needs to be made in the way that the equine industry approaches technology and uses it to self-promote to youth (i.e., social media).

- Hearing terms like “horse girls” and “horse crazy ladies” demonstrates a lack of respect for women engaged with horses. Greater exposure for both genders within the industry starts to create new norms and provides confidence for both genders in terms of involvement in the industry.

Table 6 – Mixed Bag

Here participants are welcome to talk about ALL topics that were not covered at other tables!

CONVERSATION SUMMARY

This conversation surrounded research and its place in the equine industry. Ideas were shared about how to foster more collaboration between industry and researchers. BBRM students also expressed an interest in championing equine initiatives.

- Any thriving industry needs research to support decision-making. There is concern that the equine industry does not have a body of literature related to horse care and best practices. Equine Guelph did a survey with 1000 respondents, and 95% said yes, research is valuable, but only 5% think the industry should fund it. These results indicate a desire for research, but not a desire to pay for it.
- Students in the BBRM program recognize the importance of the literature; “A lot of people gain their horse knowledge from how others see things.... you can make your own view about what is right for the horse”.
- Government made an investment in horse racing and needs to be accountable for this investment made by Ontarians. A view of the equine industry grounded in research is needed to move the industry forward. For example, consider the amount of land in southern Ontario associated with horses. Research around land use planning for horses would be valuable.

NEXT STEPS

Research supporting the business case around horses is missing. Here are some ideas for deliverables:

- Encourage the connection between the OVC and the OAC at the University of Guelph, which is committing to moving the analysis forward.
- Use BBRM students as ambassadors, highlighting the research need in the industry.
- Continue hosting events like this symposium, which will connect people to the industry.
- Connect racing in some way to other, recreational uses of horses and horse space.
- Encourage the industry to think critically about creating opportunities for the public to engage with horses and to see the value in horse research.
- Create a package at Woodbine that allows retired Thoroughbreds to connect with the public.
- “We can’t go to schools on an individual program basis” – instead, we can prepare lesson plans and bring them to schools.