

## **Equine Industry Symposium 2018**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Equine Industry Symposium was held on February 10, 2018 with the theme of “Youth Engagement – recruitment, engagement, succession.” The Symposium was open to anyone involved in the equine industry, and featured seven speakers in the morning presenting on various aspects of youth engagement, followed by round table discussions in the afternoon where participants could work together to develop actionable items to address the topic of youth engagement. When reviewing the round table summaries, common issues and concerns become apparent. As long as there are horses, those with a particular affinity for the animal can sustain this with a recreational engagement. To go beyond this requires a much deeper immersion, a realization that might be the most notable outcome of this year's symposium. The issues are not confined to any one of the themes, and all have a bearing on the issue of recruiting and retaining young people. Their consistency speaks to need for the industry to have a clear sense of direction, organization, unity, and vision to provide young people a sense of security, continuity, future options and confidence that they are making a viable career choice. Youth also need a sense of belonging.

#### **Community and Community Engagement**

Emphasize the concepts of community and community engagement. Within the industry, share, network, collaborate, freely and openly disseminate knowledge, and engage and promote young, talented, motivated individuals, creating a sense of belonging and inclusion that will foster common vision and purpose and a forward-looking approach. Within the local community, increase engagement by involving parents and the entire family in social initiatives that emphasize the versatility of the horse, inclusivity, community and life skills development.

#### **Networking and Industry Promotion**

Increase networking opportunities and improve communication within and across the industry by creating a professional association of facility owners to identify common issues, discuss common solutions, to network, and promote actions based on evidence and professionalism. Develop a clearance centre to share resources locally and regionally, including knowledge, to promote specific skills development and the development of standards and their maintenance. View engaged individuals as potential future industry members beyond their activities as equestrians, and promote their mentorship and participation. Address issues of cost, accessibility, and safety when new participants show an interest in the horse, while emphasizing the benefits, including the versatility of the horse and the role involvement can play in the development of life skills.

#### **Education and Knowledge Transfer/Dissemination**

Promote the gathering, dissemination and accessibility of knowledge and the adoption of evidence-based approaches throughout the industry as an issue of great importance. Develop a unified educational presence by holding a national meeting on education every three years and annual regional

meetings, and develop a digital web/social media presence on industry education. Get evidence-based discussions about the horse into schools by forming partnerships and engaging formally. Provide mentoring opportunities by connecting together those who want to learn and those who want to teach, perhaps through a structured internship program, and identify and promote the development of specific skills.

### **Standards and Professionalism**

Promote the development and adoption of industry standards and their maintenance, and identify and promote the development of specific skills.

## **PROCEEDINGS SUMMARY**

### Speaker presentations

**Akaash Maharaj** – Statistics from the 2010 EC Equine Industry Profile show that the equine industry contributes almost \$20 billion to Canada's GDP and well over half a million full-time equivalent positions. This puts the equine industry significantly ahead of the dairy industry in terms of both contribution to GDP (\$15 billion) and FTEs (127,000). However, the dairy industry has considerably more influence in government decision-making and consumer interest. The figures that represent the equine industry are shocking to political figures, and even more so to those involved in the equine industry itself, where our discipline-divided structure does not provide the opportunity for holistic viewing. Because we underestimate the strength of our own industry, we do not provide a unified voice to the country's decision-makers, and so lose out on the chance to impact our own future.

To add to the lack of an industry-wide view, the equine industry is facing a severe decline in young people energizing it with fresh energy and ideas. The average age of adult equestrians in Canada has continued to increase to the current 60-69 year age bracket while the percent of equestrians in their 20s, 30s and even 40s continues to diminish. "Our industry is galloping toward a demographic precipice" and unless we do something today, our industry will collapse in a mere 25 years. How do we expose young people to horses, spark their interest, engage their minds, and make them feel welcome and safe? How do we promote the growth and retention of young people whose recruitment has led to sustained interest and involvement? How do we ensure engaged, talented young people have a path to achieve the professional satisfaction needed to sustain their involvement, and to make them leaders who want to help others to do the same? Today we have the opportunity to "join forces", to work together with others who have gathered here for the love of the horse, and to build common ground and partnerships to encourage renewed efforts at recruitment, engagement and succession for our industry.

**Heather Ramey** – Activity participation for youth does not follow any clear cut model. Whether youth participate in an activity depends on the activity itself, the age, experience and situation of the youth. Face-to-face recruitment has a much better success rate than flyers or announcements. The more engaged you get them early on, the more likely they are to stick with the activity. Youth get engaged in activities that their peers are engaged in. Parents play a key role in youth engagement – parents who participate in activities themselves or who value participation, who are better educated and have a

higher income, will more likely engage their children in activities. Youth stay engaged in an activity if it enhances their own personal growth and provides meaning outside of themselves. The importance of putting activity engagement on a resume was seen as very low in our studies. Youth become disengaged from an activity due to lack of enjoyment, lack of accessibility, social pressures or competing priorities, or lack of confidence. If we want to engage young people in equine activities, we need to remove financial barriers, provide opportunities for increased responsibility and challenges, encourage connection to others, and create more options for involvement.

**Jenny Mayer** – Agscape provides a voice to the agri-food industry in the classroom (grades 7-12). Students learn about food, agronomy, biotechnology, environment, animal care and more. With more and more people living in urban centres, it is becoming increasingly important to connect students with agricultural principles and ideas, to connect them with their food and who produces it. Any teacher can request an Agscape lesson for free and they can choose from a library of lesson topics. Each lesson highlights career options in agriculture to dispel the belief that agricultural careers involve only tractors and overalls. The Food Systems View makes students aware of the breadth of the agri-food industry – engineers, agronomists, veterinarians, salespeople, accountants, graphic designers, technicians, delivery drivers, and more. Agscape also delivers events with hands-on experiences to engage students in agri-food issues. Industry representatives are on hand to connect the students to professionals and allow networking opportunities. Agscape provides students with an impactful, experiential learning opportunity to help them understand and appreciate the food they consume each day, and to fuel career aspirations for future agri-food employees. As the equine industry sits in the agricultural sphere, opportunity exists to use the template Agscape has created to introduce equine topics into the classroom, and in the same way, work to dispel myths surrounding the equine industry and promote the range of possible careers with horses.

**Tracey McCague-McElrae** – Ontario Equestrian is the provincial sport organization for equestrian sport in Ontario. It is dedicated to promoting equestrian sport and providing programs and guidelines for safe level play for both horses and people. Rider-centred programming includes coaching, officials and facility certification. Parent education is key to keeping youth involved and engaged in the sport. The Long-Term Equestrian Development program provides a clear pathway for riders from childhood to adulthood, whether competitive or recreational. OE has partnered with a variety of other associations and organizations to provide quality programs for all aspects of equestrianism.

**Kim Leffley** – With the advent of the iGeneration, it may seem that youth are more interested in showing and winning ribbons than learning about horses. This is fueled by the beliefs that horses are expensive and riding is considered an elite sport. Partnerships must emerge from equine organizations to create a sustainable plan for the equine industry. We must look outside of the equine world for recruitment, and we must all work together to sell our product to engage youth. Currently Canada has a multitude of organizations dedicated to equine activities with no one clear body responsible for engaging youth. The Canadian Pony Club (CPC) delivers programming aimed to educate young minds about horses, not just about riding. Sharing resources lowers costs and provides economical knowledge to non-horse-knowledgeable parents. The CPC has infrastructure already in place that values contribution, volunteerism and philanthropy over winning ribbons.

**David Reynolds** – There is a plethora of opportunities for funding positions in the agricultural sector, which equine activities fall under. With a little ingenuity, a proposal can be submitted to a funding agency to secure grants for hiring employees, pay for training, reduce energy costs and environmental impact, research and development, export development and to support youth entrepreneurs. Youth looking for employment can register on many of the hiring program websites, This thereby offering potential employers a funding scheme where the employer only pays a small proportion of the employee's wages. A list of funding programs for Equine is available at [www.inacservices.com](http://www.inacservices.com).

**Gayle Ecker** – Equine Guelph was created by the industry for the industry to disseminate information on all things equine and support equine education and research. The numerous programs administered by Equine Guelph show the value of developing partnerships to provide opportunities for youth. Equimania! may be the introduction to horses for many children and gives them the opportunity for hands-on learning about horses. The newest initiative, the Horse Portal, is a partnership platform for an equine community available to everyone in the equine industry. Each partner has their own customized webpage for the portal. The strength of the partnerships strengthens the industry by bringing together equine enthusiasts from all disciplines. Together we can be stronger.

#### Round table discussion outcomes

##### **Recruitment:**

1. There are misconceptions that getting involved in the equine industry requires money, existing experience and age.
  - a. Have a large, unified, education presence at events across Canada – annual provincial conference with a national conference every 3 years to discuss and focus on education, develop partnerships and network
  - b. Develop a digital/social media presence on the web, and encourage face-to-face sessions at schools
  - c. Develop partnerships with other organisations such as those addressing accessibility in order to source opportunities to educate outside of the equine industry and appeal to non-horse people and parents
  - d. Partner with schools to get youth involved in industry (clubs, career nights at school, field trips, more than just vets)
2. Marketing: increase awareness of the versatility and inclusiveness of industry engagement to the very young (5-10yrs), include parent involvement, promote the message that horses are for everyone!
  - a. Promote use of branded hashtags from all disciplines, filtered through OE (#rideontario)
  - b. Get different equine organizations into regular dialogue
  - c. Entice youth at an early age
  - d. Bring clinicians into small towns
  - e. Operate family-oriented riding programs
  - f. Post selfies with your horse and include your personal story. Ask questions of the viewer to promote engagement

3. Accessibility: make it easier for people to get to know the industry, provide directions to nearby stables. Create programs that allow local barns to engage their communities, and draw on love of (all) animals
  - a. Bring a friend or parent to your lesson
  - b. Educate participants and visitors and emphasize safety
  - c. OE (or EG) could create a template to help organize, promote and host events
  - d. Collaborate and encourage one another – focus on the horse
  - e. Free racetrack invitations and tours
4. Unity: there are too many groups. Who are we and what do we do? Get everyone on the same page. This will solve cultural differences, raise awareness and give a voice to the industry
  - a. Talk to each group
  - b. Remind people that working with horses helps build life skills

**Engagement:**

Conversation revolved around the question of how to sustain the interest of individuals who have already become aware of horses and the industry and who are involved with a level of interest and sustained attendance that indicates the potential for them to become seriously committed to the industry and for them to develop their skills to a progressively higher level. Ideas were generated under four main areas (not in any order of priority):

1. Provide enrichment and education and make participants aware of meaningful opportunities to increase their engagement, develop their skills, network, and develop awareness of the full range of options within the industry, and in this way add value to what they gain through their regular involvement as pupils
  - a. provide educational opportunities within each facility that focus on specific skills, attributes, specialties and career opportunities
  - b. recognise that while each facility through its existing resources and staff may only be able to provide educational opportunities within specific areas, and no one facility can cover everything
  - c. resolve this by networking among facilities to make everyone aware of what *you* have to offer and to increase attendance at your special sessions
  - d. create a webpage; Ontario Equestrian or the Horse Portal can maintain an up-to-date, complete list of all the educational/experiential opportunities available in an area
  - e. make the provision of educational opportunities, at whatever frequency a stable can maintain, part of the standard business model rather than an occasional event
  - f. encourage facility owners to meet regularly to discuss opportunities, sharing of resources, and how the network should be developed
  - g. view this as an opportunity to build community within the industry and promote professionalism
2. Create an equine professional association to bring together industry professionals in multiple disciplines and careers, and build a community of diverse practice.
  - a. gather together a group of interested and knowledgeable industry participants from a wide range of different backgrounds.

- b. establish the group's purpose and plan
  - c. establish an online presence, the location and time for meeting
  - d. agree to create a fellowship of industry professionals through online and direct personal networking
  - e. agree to the principle of cooperation among members
  - f. agree that each member must bring one other like-minded person to the group
3. Develop educational incentives to address a lack of industry knowledge and create motivation for participants to strive for a consistent level of animal care and management across the industry that is based on evidence.
- a. emphasise the role of mentorship in the development of new industry members
  - b. form partnerships with local professionals (e.g. farriers, vets) to engage them as speakers to broaden participants' knowledge of industry roles and topics
  - c. find out what other equine facilities and groups are already doing in the area of education (check OE or the Horse Portal websites)
  - d. consider providing education at a range of different levels (e.g. co-op opportunities in schools) and using other animal species where the lesson can be transferred to horses
  - e. increase accessibility of knowledge, e.g., through online offerings and mentorships
  - f. develop the social/cultural aspects of industry engagement through events that involve parents, friends and the community
4. Consolidate and enhance the engagement of interested young people by building community, facilitating their participation, and providing added value through the type and quality of experiences available to them beyond their primary participation as pupils
- a. draw engaged young people deeper into the process of animal care and management, facility management, lesson design and training
  - b. seek their opinion in making appropriate decisions
  - c. provide mentorship beyond that provided in riding lessons
  - d. discuss the directions they could take in the industry
  - e. make co-op experiences available through all levels of education
  - f. develop social initiatives that engage the entire family
  - g. consider organising carpooling to make facilities more accessible

**Succession:**

- 1. Connect people that want to learn to those that want to share their knowledge
  - a. Community portal/board to connect people
  - b. Full-time, part-time and volunteer opportunities
  - c. Advertising, magazines, Ontario Equestrian
  - d. Magazine Ingate published 2x/year in need of young person to contribute articles, photos related to gold/platinum hunter/jumper shows
  - e. Visit classes and schools
  - f. Educate learners/counsellors (high school)
  - g. Pitch idea of community board to Ontario Equestrian
  - h. Connect riders with those that have horses

- i. Contact CanAm
- 2. Water the grass that is already there. Help the educated/established sustain their operations and begin to mentor and grow their students
  - a. Communication from national/provincial organizations of resources available to horse people (social media, digital education)
  - b. Participation in local/provincial/national organization communications strategies
  - c. Position for expert funds program – horse extension agents/consultants
  - d. Make funds available through grants, scholarship and living wages for people to stay in the industry. Government-funded “go to” person
  - e. Work together on professional standards and quality mentoring
  - f. Define clear pathways
- 3. Professionalism through standardization and expectations – consumer confidence
  - a. Identify pathway options for students
  - b. Standardize education programs
  - c. Collaboration and partnerships (schools, insurance, etc.)
  - d. Email/contact schools to stimulate education and awareness (Agscope)
  - e. Use horses as educational support (e.g. mounted police community visits)