

Equine Industry Symposium



Professionalism and Standards

October 27, 2018
University of Guelph
Thornbrough 1200

Executive Summary

The 2018 Equine Industry Symposium was held on Saturday October 27th in Thornbrough Hall at the University of Guelph from 8:30am until 4:30pm. Horse enthusiasts from a variety of sectors participated in engaging discussions on standards and professionalism. All the speakers were well-received by the attendees. Opening remarks from facilitator Akaash Maharaj focused on the impact of the Canadian equine industry, particularly how it dwarfs the dairy industry. Invited speakers included Catherine Geci, Business Development Manager at the University of Ottawa, who spoke about the importance of professionalism in building connections and lasting partnerships; Dr Kendra Coulter, Professor of Labour Studies at Brock University, reported that 50% of stable workers earn minimum wage or less and almost half of the workers are improperly classified as independent contractors, and are thus are not protected by the Employee Standards Act; Pam Coburn from Ontario Equestrian explained four main gaps in the industry: 1) horsemanship and understanding of horses' needs, 2) athlete and coach development, 3) competition eligibility, and 4) the fragmentation of the sport; Diane Creech, elite dressage rider, compared coaching certification between Germany and Canada; Len Kahn, Kahntact Marketing, talked about the importance of branding; Cally Merritt, Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians, stressed standards as proof of providing the best services possible, particularly in an industry where certification is not mandatory.



The University of Guelph's Vice President of Research, Malcolm Campbell, enjoyed the event

Co-facilitator Tim Nelson summarized six action items that arose from the discussions:

1. Create standardized job descriptions for employees at horse facilities across all sectors
2. Collaborate and consolidate horse organizations and associations – pool strength for a unified voice
3. Identify champions to lead the future vision of our industry
4. Identify exemplary employers as role models
5. Identify funding opportunities
6. With a unified voice, meet with government representatives to raise awareness of the size and scope of the equine industry in Canada (which is larger than the dairy industry).

The discussion is expected to be continued through the <http://thehorseportal.ca> (Equine Industry Symposium under the Conferences tab) with industry input and involvement in bringing these action items to fruition.

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Audience metrics

The registration for the event was completed through Eventbrite which received 720 page views mostly as a result of direct search. Overall, there were 176 registrations, and 175 people actually attended (45 of whom did not register (in-course students, speakers, organizers and VIPs)). There were registrants on Eventbrite that did not attend and there were also people who attended who registered at the door. Figure 1 shows feedback survey responses completed by 69 participants indicating why they were interested in attending. The overwhelming response was that they wanted to learn more about the industry, which is promising. However no participants selected the option of “helping to change the industry”, which is somewhat concerning as that does not indicate synergy with the event goals, which were to engage a broad representation of equine industry enthusiasts in discussions regarding professionalism and standards, and to consider collaborating on industry certification. The demographics of the audience were mostly under 20 years of age, with 41-60 year olds being the second highest participants (Fig 2). The participants represented 50% students, and were mostly female (83%). There was an overwhelming presence of hunter/jumper riders, along with a significant amount of dressage, pleasure and eventing riders (Fig 3). Overall, the symposium drew people from a variety of disciplines which indicates the event is reaching diverse sectors of the industry.

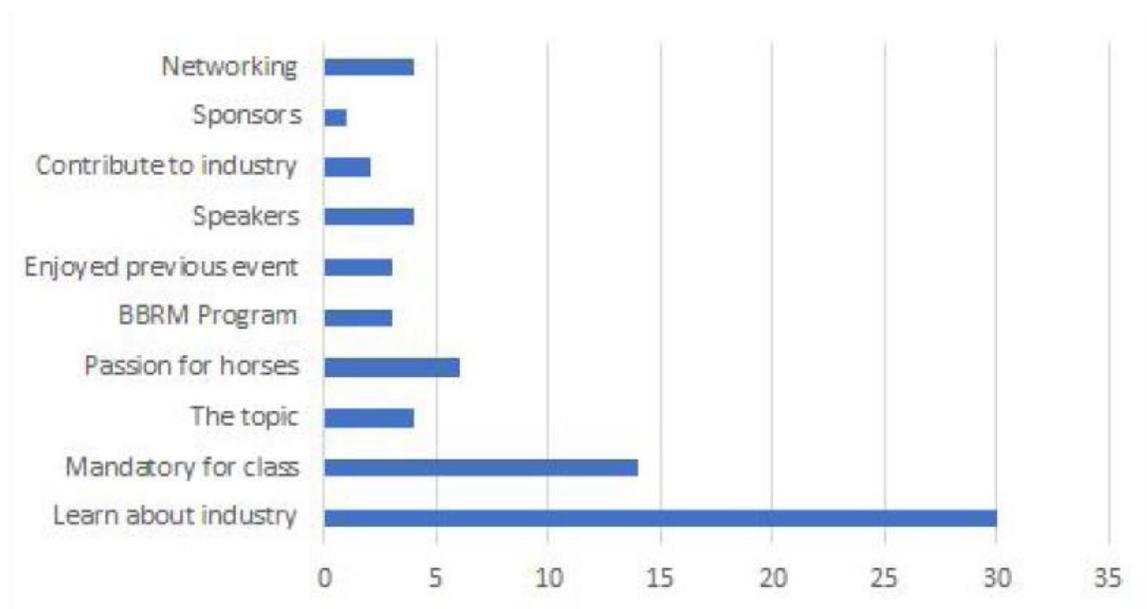


Figure 1: Responses from participants (n=69) on reasons why they wanted to attend the event.

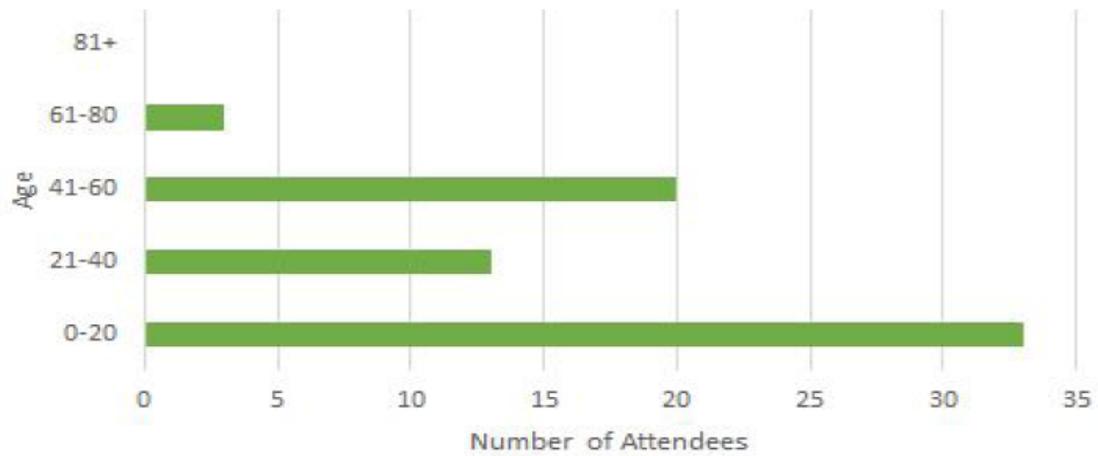


Figure 2: Age distribution of participants (n=69)

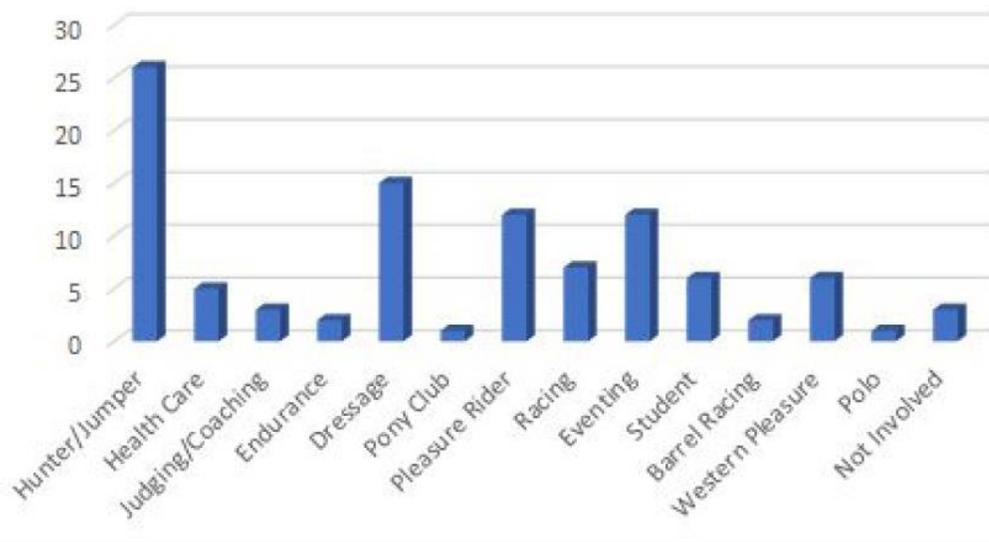


Figure 3: Representation of participants (n=69) from different sectors of the industry

Speaker Summaries

The symposium had two facilitators, Akaash Maharaj and Tim Nelson, who together introduced six speakers on various topics revolving around the central theme of professionalism and standards. All speakers were well-received by the participants.



Akaash Maharaj

Akaash Maharaj is the CEO of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC). As an athlete, he was a triple gold medalist at the International Championships of Equestrian Skill at Arms. He later led Canada's national equestrian team and federation as CEO during its most successful Olympics and Paralympics of all time.

Maharaj began the symposium by presenting statistics on the size of the Canadian herd, which in absolute numbers is only 1/10 the size of the American herd, but in terms of equids/100 people, Canada equals the USA. Similarly, the contribution of the equine industry to the Canadian GDP is only 1/5 that of the USA, but the Canadian per capita contribution is almost twice as much as the American per capita contribution. The total jobs provided by the equine industry in Canada and the USA are almost even, but again Canada far outstrips the USA when looking at jobs/1000 citizens. And most stunningly, the Canadian equine industry supports more animals, people, jobs and contribution to GDP than the dairy industry, and yet the familiarity and loyalty of the dairy industry to the Canadian people is household knowledge. Maharaj presented five challenges to the audience to consider over the day:

1. How do we develop standards that are: meaningful; effective; based on rigorous research; regarded as legitimate by professional providers; and perceived as desirable by consumers?
2. How do we promulgate standards? How do we persuade providers to want to meet and maintain standards? How do we persuade consumers to prefer professionals who meet standards, or be willing to pay a premium for certified quality?
3. What are our philosophical priorities? Do we prefer strong enforcement through public regulation, or strong market flexibility through self-regulation?
4. Who should uphold standards? Who should define, certify, monitor, and regulate. How do we ensure that that body is competent, democratic, and accountable?
5. How do we get from here to there? What is each of us prepared to do, and how do we take our commitments forward, beginning tomorrow?



Tim Nelson

Nelson is the CEO of Livestock Research Innovation Corporation and Executive Director of PigGen Canada. He has spent 35 years in leadership positions of farmer-owned and operated livestock and poultry organizations in Australia and Canada, being mostly involved in research. He is also the co-owner of three animal health & welfare technology start-up companies and a back-packers hostel in Newfoundland.

Nelson engaged the audience with thought-provoking questions throughout the discussion periods and summarized the main action items at the end of the day.



Catherine Geci

Catherine Geci is the Business Development Manager for Innovation Support Services at the University of Ottawa. At the Innovation Support Services Geci is responsible for assessing new technologies, developing and implementing commercialization plans, negotiating licenses and liaising with the industry. She is also a strong supporter of student entrepreneurship.

Geci spoke about professionalism and building relationships through business dealings. She started by admitting that she was not sure what she could teach that was not already known. She then went on to say that when she received a four-word email (“When can we meet”) from a young entrepreneur, she knew that she could provide some things of value, if only to make people more sensitive to the practice of professionalism in business dealings, and to underline how professionalism boils down to one value: respect. People do business with individuals that they know, like and trust, thus trust becomes one of the most important assets that is linked to reputation and marketing. Trust is developed through respect reflected in mindset, behaviours, actions, and communication. Respect demands integrity and drives collaboration.



Kendra Coulter

Kendra Coulter is an Associate Professor and Chair in the Department of Labour Studies at Brock University. Dr. Coulter is an award winning author, frequent media commentator, and global leader in the analysis of human-animal labour. Her scholarship focuses on how to improve jobs and work-lives, with particular expertise on humane jobs, horses and human equine relations, animal cruelty investigation work, animals and care work, and animals in public policy.

Dr. Coulter focused her presentation on her recently released study conducted on horse stable employers and employees. The results of her Ontario-wide survey showed that 95% of stable workers were women and of those 96% were white while stable owners/operators were 82% women and 96% white. The top three reasons for leaving employment were low pay, disrespect in the workplace and poor schedules. Over 50% of employees earn minimum wage or less, and over 30% are improperly classified, thus not protected by the Employee Standards Act. On a better note the study found high levels of satisfaction with both employees and employers, and that many employers are grateful of their employees and evolve new management practices to retain and recruit good workers. However conditions remain difficult and high turnover continues to affect the people and the horses in the industry. Dr Coulter's study results can be found at <http://equinework.ca>.



Pam Coburn

Pam Coburn is the Corporate Secretary and Director of Sport at Ontario Equestrian. She has been an equine coach for ten years and she is actively involved in the development of the equestrian coaching program.

Coburn spoke about Ontario Equestrian (OE) and industry standards. While OE has 22,000 members (87% women), there is a low retention rate of the members. A major challenge in the industry is the lack of standards for care and management of horses, safe introduction to sport, and responsible coaching and competition. Everyone in the industry has a responsibility to uphold any standards and regulations. Money is a large factor - for example, a coach may not make helmets a requirement if it means losing a client. Thus is it important to have certified coaches introduce children into the industry safely and to improve rider skills through lesson plans. Money is better invested on quality products. OE promotes rider development through Rider Levels and the Long Term Athlete Development. Coburn explained four main gaps she has seen in the industry: 1) horsemanship and the need to better understand horses' needs, 2) athlete and coach development, 3) competition eligibility where riders should have to prove performance at lower levels before being allowed to show at higher levels, and 4) the fragmentation of the sport and the fact that all aspects of the industry need to come together.



Diane Creech

Diane Creech is an elite dressage rider, trainer and coach. Creech grew up in where she completed her German Bereiter training before moving to Canada in 1989. Her accomplishments include: a team silver medal at the Pan American Games in 2007, reserve rider for the 2015 Pan American Games and 2012 London Olympic Games. She received the Premier Equestrian Sportsmanship award in 2011.

Creech talked about coach certification, comparing the process in Germany compared to Canada. The process in Germany is much longer and more standardised than the Canadian process, with the result that in Germany it is almost unheard of to work as a coach without going through the necessary schooling/testing. In Canada there are many coaches who work without being certified. The Canadian program allows the individual to choose what level of coaching they would like to be certified in and the riding exam is not judged by expert riders. This is vastly different than the German program, where top riders judge your skills and decide if you should continue with the coaching program or if you will be turned away. Creech explained that this system ensures that coaches are well educated and can do the things they are teaching. Creech believes you can only teach what you feel, meaning that a coach can read about a skill but if they have not performed it, then teaching it will be a challenge. Creech also believes that coaches should never stop learning even after certification and that all participants in the industry should do their part in creating a standard by seeking out certified coaches.



Len Kahn

Len Kahn is the President of Kahntact, one of North America's leading agricultural commercial firms. He works at a strategic level and develops marketing plans and brand strategies for leading agribusiness enterprises.

Kahn talked about the importance of branding and how a brand goes deeper than a name – it encompasses feelings and loyalty balanced by rational thought (eg. price). A brand is a promise to deliver satisfaction and quality. Brands are built through effective communication and experience; brands are like bank accounts – personal experiences with the company/industry either add to or take away from the account. Kahn also explained that brands are owned by the public not the company or industry. A good brand can survive in times of stress by the trust and loyalty placed in it by the consumers. The perceived value determines financial gain. Value is determined by consistency (integrating the brand into everything) and frequency (get the message out there through many channels). Branding is the sum total of the industry, and everyone must embrace the same face to be recognized as a brand. Luckily, people working with animals, agriculture and as veterinarians have the most credibility, thus building a brand is relatively easy. The challenge is to live up to the brand promise.



Cally Merritt

Cally Merritt is an RVT and certified equine massage therapist. She is also the Vice President of the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians. She presented on how the vet techs moved from being unregulated to a certified system.

Merritt spoke from the perspective of a career path that offers certification, even though it is not mandatory. In order to be accepted by the industry, it is necessary to listen to what their needs are and develop an action plan based on common interests (the welfare of the horse). If standards achieved through certification are the norm, then we can be confident of providing the best services possible. The benefits are clear – well-rounded knowledge, up-to-date information, network of like-minded colleagues, and liability protection. While it is still possible to hire vet techs that are uncertified, without proper education these “street techs” cannot possibly know if they are providing the best services or patient care. Merritt explained that to become an RVT, she first had to earn a degree, complete an ethics course, and pass the national RVT test. Continuing education is a requirement and she must carry her own insurance. While being an RVT is not mandatory, most RVTs do it out of a passion for the industry and to know that they can provide the best care possible.

Discussions

Question and answer periods were provided immediately after each speaker, but there were also two dedicated discussion periods during the day – one at the end of the morning sessions and one at the end of the day. Some key points from the morning discussion were about knowledge and best practice analysis to determine what should be standardized in the industry. Relating to this, there was talk about the need for larger more comprehensive studies of the industry. A gap between young riders and older riders was also brought up and it was argued that many riders cannot afford to ride when their parents stop paying for lessons and that many pick it up again when they are older and can afford it. This leads to a gap in young adult riders and the issue of trying to keep riders engaged for longer was also discussed. Jobs in the industry were discussed. The fact that jobs in the industry are not seen as “real jobs” was discussed and along with this the lack of public knowledge and understanding of the jobs that are available in the industry.

The afternoon discussion started with the question “Should we move from the current system to a better regulated system and what are the barriers to this new system?” Some of the barriers people pointed out were grandfathering, outdated certifications, the way education is viewed in the industry, financial issues with certification/standards, informing public, geography, wages, lack of consequences and the need for a general information page for parents. Participants also raised the point that a minimum standard should be made so that we can build on it. The next question asked was “Would certain facilities certify levels of employee standards, health standards etc.?” The point that a facility should only be certified if all its coaches, workers, owners etc. are certified was brought up and many people thought this was a good system, but others brought up the fact that facilities could show inspectors one thing on the day of their visit that did not represent their day-to-day standards. Another point that was discussed was the need for public relations to move forward and speak with people outside of the industry. Another point was to conduct a study on safety in relation to certified vs uncertified coaches and to let the result be known to the public. The last point that was discussed was the need for branding to gather financial support for help with education, standards and certification. Overall, all of the points in the discussion were important in moving the industry forward and the following key words came out of the discussions:

- Professionalism
- Trust
- Respect
- Value
- Win-win
- Empathy
- Integrity
- Relationships
- Collaboration
- Training
- Certification
- Safety
- Shared Standards
- Combined Forces
- Rider as athlete and worker
- Horses as athlete and worker
- Youth education
- Insurance
- Risk management
- Honesty
- Facility standards
- Public outcry
- Stronger together
- Fun
- Stable Management
- Knowledge as an asset

Nelson summarized the day by listing the following action items:

1. Standards (Job Mapping): Decide what jobs should be professionalized and what the unprofessional jobs entail. Job titles should mean specific things to employers across all sectors and a groom should not be doing a trainer's job.
2. Opportunities to come together (coming together from all aspects of the industry to agree on standards): Collaborate and consolidate the many horse organizations and associations, and pool strength for a unified voice.
3. Champions (Big names to associate with the new standards): Identify champions to lead the future vision of our industry. These do not need to be Olympic medalists, but should be eminent people that are known and respected.
4. Learn from employers who are trying to do better and succeeding (Look for facilities with improved employee standards): Interview, learn from, and model a new system after these facilities. Show the world and push them as examples of how things should be.
5. Funding (Reaching out to raise funds for new certifications and standards): Get young people on phones asking for help in a sustainable future in the industry. Passion for the sport can go a long way in raising funds. Lobby for government grants to grow the industry and contribute to the economy.
6. Political Leaders (Meet and talk to politicians): Show politicians and other important figures what the equine industry does for Canada and all that it has achieved so far. With a unified voice, meet with government representatives to raise awareness of the size and scope of the equine industry in Canada (which is larger than the dairy industry).

While the day ended before being able to address these action items, the discussion can be continued on the <http://thehorseportal.ca>. Look for the Equine Industry Symposium under the Conferences tab. Registration is free using the coupon code **EISforum2018**.

Sponsorship and Exhibitors

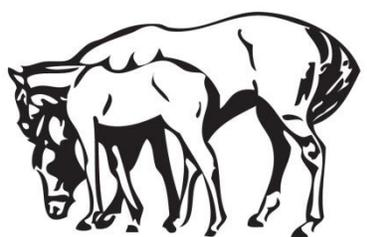
Thank you to our sponsors: Schleese/SaddleFit4Life, Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS), Equine Guelph, Ontario Agriculture College (OAC), and Ontario Veterinary College (OVC). Additional exhibitors included the Bachelor of Bio-Resource Management and the Ridgetown Campus. Saddlefit 4 Life donated tuition to a 5-day Ergonomics course (value of \$2500), which was won by fourth year BBRM Equine Management student Shaelynn Langmann (Fig 4).



Figure 4: Shaelynn Langmann (2nd from left) was the winner of the 5-day Ergonomics course awarded by Saddlefit 4 Life representatives (from L to R) Julia Alebrand, Sonja Gagnon and Mackenzie Jay.



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