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Survey quantifies value of area's equine industry

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The results of a new equine survey are expected to help shape the future of Oldham County's horse industry, which generates nearly \$50 million a year.

The survey, conducted over the past year, is one of the first comprehensive, countywide equine studies done in the nation, said Doug Wampler, executive director of Oldham Ahead.

It was sponsored by the Oldham County Equine Council and Oldham Ahead to determine the economic impact of the equine industry on the county.

#### PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

##### 2007 Oldham County Equine Survey

- 3,186 horses are housed in Oldham County, 65 percent of which are thoroughbreds.
- There are 377 locations where equine are housed in Oldham.
- The total economic impact of the equine industry is \$48.9 million annually. Of that, \$7.79 million is paid out in equine labor costs and more than \$32.7 million is spent on operational costs.
- Property taxes paid by equine owners and operations total more than \$515,000.
- A total of 13,929 acres valued at an estimated \$148 million are occupied by equine operations in Oldham.
- The estimated value of all the horses in the county is \$40.4 million.

The survey shows about 10 percent of the land in Oldham is used for horse-related businesses.

"That's a significant use of land," Wampler said, adding that it gives the county a rural ambiance that everyone can benefit from.

The survey also found there are 3,186 horses housed at 377 locations in Oldham County, and

equine owners and operations paid more than \$515,000 in property taxes.

Informing people of the industry's impact should translate into policies and protections, like land-preservation efforts, that will benefit horse owners, Wampler said.

"We look at it as, if an industry that generated \$50 million a year in positive economic impact and hired 400 employees wanted to locate in the county, the county would jump at that opportunity," he said.

For instance, the county could give a break on the sales tax imposed on feed and other horse supplies like it does for cattle and other farm animals, he said.

Other states have different incentives in place and are drawing horse owners away from Kentucky, Wampler said.

Mary Lowry, who owns Altavista Farm in Skylight, said she hopes the survey will help people understand the importance of green space in the county and work to preserve it.

"Horses need green space," she said. "If you don't have green space, you don't have horses."

Lowry said there should be more measures in place to promote preservation of large tracts of land.

"Farms are being sold off at an alarming rate," she said, adding that there needs to be more land conservation efforts and smart-growth options available for people, which is something the equine council is addressing.

A tax-credit initiative might help reverse that, Lowry said. Plus, that's something she said she could benefit from at her 45-acre horse operation, where people can go horseback riding and get lessons.

Considering that horses contribute to a variety of enterprises, yet their impact on the county's infrastructure is minimal, a tax credit only makes sense, she said.

Each week, 100 people come to Lowry's farm to ride, and 60 percent of those people come from outside of Oldham.

The county is home to thoroughbreds, saddlebreds and other breeds, as well as fox hunters, polo players, trail riders and businesses that offer boarding, lessons and trail riding. Horses are used for therapy, and people who take up riding find it greatly improves their lives, Lowry said.

"It's just a tremendous way of life," she said.

The survey has been shared with county officials, the Kentucky Horse Council and the Kentucky Equine Education Project.

Lowry said she hopes it will be used to help get the county a horse park, which would have a great impact on tourism. She said everyone from horse industry leaders to county officials have been impressed by the survey's findings.

"The biggest response is people say 'Wow.' No one ever really quantified it before."

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