

New York State Equine Industry Leaders Forum:

How many times do you hear a disparaging word about another breed, or another style of riding or another discipline around a barn? The horse industry in general and especially here in New York has suffered from a number of problems, to include: Lack of unity, Lack of collaboration, Lack of respect for the industry, Lack of recognition of the industry as a significant contributor to the economy, and Infighting within the industry.

For the type of people that horse people are - those that are totally in love with one of God's most majestic creatures - we are really one of the most fragmented groups in the world. The App's don't like the Quarters; the Quarters don't like the Morgans and they all don't like the Thoroughbreds. This has been true through the centuries; otherwise there would not be the proliferation of breeds and disciplines as exist today.

Will it ever change? Probably not in the lifetime of either this writer or anyone foolish enough to read this article. But something can and is being done to bring the industry together within the state. It is a new group called the **New York State Equine Industry Leaders**.

In 1998, this group [the brainchild of Jeannie Griffiths, the Extension Horse Specialist for Cornell University] began to organize with leaders from many of the various organizations, which are involved with the horse statewide coming together. The original concept of the group was to bring these leaders together, to establish a working agenda which supported the horse as an entity - **REGARDLESS OF BREED, STYLE OF RIDING OR DISCIPLINE** - and work together to attain common goals. Since the first meeting, the group has met semiannually and has come together in a right professional manner. The group includes members of the state government, members of non-governmental agencies, members from the racing industry, members from the breeding and sport horse side of the world, and members from state educational institutions. During the first meeting it was found that the members all had a lot in common. The group intends to focus on only one major project at a time. The first major project adopted by The N.Y.S. Equine Industry Leaders was to support a subject that affects every horseperson in the state in one way or another -- Inherent Risk. In the subsequent meetings, the group has come up with some very workable ideas to mobilize the horse riding public into a "united" voice.

Among other subjects the group has addressed over the years, or will address in the future are: Horses as Agriculture, the 2000 NYS Equine Survey, Horse Breeding as Agriculture (now complete after a 5 year process of chipping away at the obstacles), the development of a true United Voice of the New York Horse Industry, Better methods of networking within our industry, Workmen's Compensation issues and Tax Issues.

Among the groups and organizations participating so far have been –

1. The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (To include Representatives from the State Veterinarians Office)
2. Representatives from the Assembly and Senate Agricultural Committee Staffs
3. The New York State Horse Breeding Development Fund
4. The Harness Horse Breeders of NYS
5. NYS Racing and Wagering Board
6. NYS Thoroughbred Breeders Association
7. NYS Horse Council
8. NYS Farm Bureau
9. Cornell Cooperative Extension Service/Cornell University
10. SUNY Morrisville
11. Cazenovia College
12. Council of Agricultural Organizations
13. North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NAHRA)

The concept is to keep the organization small, volunteer and proactive. A short disclaimer must be made at this point, and that is that those organizations above which are prohibited by law from actively lobbying are used strictly as sounding boards by those of us who are not so restricted.

The upshot, fellow rider, driver and breeders, is that the industry within New York State is slowly beginning to sort itself out and come together mainly due to the efforts of one of our own.

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