

Where Do All the Colts and Fillies Go?

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



The cow industry is very large and diverse, and obviously the cow and calf get most of the attention. Those who work in the industry have very diverse jobs and, as the industry has traversed many centuries, many things have changed and some haven't.

One thing that has remained is the cowgirl and cowboy. If you look either term up in the dictionary, the obvious reference to someone who takes care of cows is noted, but quickly following the note regarding cows, the horse is mentioned. In fact, some definitions infer the term cowgirl or cowboy actually refers to one who is mounted or riding a horse while attending to the cattle.

So through the centuries, the horse has been integral to the cattle industry. And not unlike the cattle business, the horse business also has undergone change. The basic expectations, divergence of use, expected performance and ultimate outcomes regarding horses have changed dramatically. Many ranches and feedlots, including the Dickinson Research Extension Center, utilize horses on a daily bases and see to their care in great detail.

The challenge, at least on the horse side of the equation, is when the time comes to sell a horse. The horse trailer is met by many others also hauling horses to the sale. The result is an overabundance of horses. Using the DREC as an example, the center produces well-bred, registered horses that would fit working cattle operations. The horses have been handled and worked by students. Many have taken their initial rides at the DREC.

The recent value of these primarily 2- and 3-year-old horses at public auction was \$286.07. In past years, the average sale value has ranged from a low of \$213.75 per horse to a high of \$736.11 per horse. Although subject to opinion, the breeding behind these horses, as well as the expected ranch performance, would be good to excellent.

Like many things, underlying thoughts would be

indicative that things may be changing. This change is more significant than what color of horse one buys or how great the pedigree is. Maybe the reason is world politics, oil prices, land prices, competitive grain prices or turning food into fuel. Who knows? Competition, great markets and conflicting human thoughts are driving up costs, but also, in the case of the horse, driving down value. The cost of maintaining, growing and training a horse is escalating, but the market has gone away.

One can talk about the low-value of a well-bred, performance-orientated young horse, but one is distressed when one sees all the weanlings this country can produce with no expectation as to what the purpose or use of the weanling will be. Truly, the level of frustration at the inability to find any solution is evident. However, solutions will come, many not pleasant or wanted, but no living entity simply can be stored.

Our obligation for care is always present. In the future, our responsibility starts by being responsible breeders. It is quite evident that the days of simply allowing mares to breed for the opportunity to produce a foal in the spring are over. Those in the cattle business understand oversupply means nothing but failure. Likewise, as time moves forward and people's views change, the horse industry must respond.

Breeding horses for no purpose should not happen. In the end, the foal must be fed, cared for and provided a home - a home that will grow, train and develop the foal into a needed, wanted and mature horse. If that option is not available for the foals you produce, then think twice about breeding mares this spring.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.



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