

It's Not Cheap to Raise a Good Ranch Horse

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



If one wants advice, write a column. The advice and opinions are great and certainly help unfold the various impediments to understanding the world.

The reverse also is true. As a writer, one hopefully is helping the thought process as much as the action to follow. Many times the desire to act can precede the thought. At that point, we call it an afterthought.

The point of a previous discussion was that producing foals was just that, an afterthought. It is best to make sure that the breeding of mares and other species we may manage is not an afterthought. A management plan is needed, as well as all that follows, which includes marketing.

We all need to make individual decisions based on our own assessment of the future. That assessment not only includes managerial, operational, marketing and profit/loss assessments, but also industry needs and concerns balanced against the ever-present give and take of issues.

That being said, the individual must do his or her best to assess the future and pencil the best estimates to make things work. The principles of supply and demand will not change.

Let's go back to the discussion of foals. Premating evaluations of potential costs can help make a good decision.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, a health program is important. During the first year, foals receive an initial vaccination and appropriate booster for Eastern and Western Encephalomyelitis, West Nile virus, Rhinopneumonitis (EHV-1 and EHV-4), influenza (A1 and A2, KY97), strangles, a tetanus toxoid and four anti-parasitic treatments.

Mares receive all but the strangles vaccination annually and the quarterly parasite program. In addition, the mares are provided protection from abortions caused by rhinopneumonitis.

Additional annual veterinary care costs include castration of the colts (approximately \$100 each) and occasional care required due to injuries. The bill for the annual veterinary costs per mare and foal averaged more than \$131 and just less than \$100 for young horses.

In summary, the average annual, direct expenses for the breeding mares were \$797, utilizing the analysis provided by FINPACK (Center for Farm Financial Management, University of Minnesota) for 2006. The costs for the young, growing horses were \$481.

Although these numbers reflect typical estimates for the center's production costs for the management and operation of a band of 20 ranch horses on a research center in western North Dakota, the figures are presented to encourage others to think about their own costs. Two- to 3-year-old horses at the center are going to carry an expense tag of \$1,500.

This \$1,500 figure does not have training expenses added to the equation. Training is a variable figure because it depends on the level of training needed and desired.

What would your costs be? In terms of producing horses, there are expenses and the bill is due.

Breeding is not an afterthought. It should be planned with expected outcomes. In one of the responses to the earlier discussion regarding the number and value of foals, one longtime horse breeder noted that he always wondered why cattle operations try to produce their own horses.

As each industry continues to be more complex and complicated, there is some merit to that statement. If one truly adds the costs of developing a horse with expectations of performance, one can afford to buy a good, well-trained horse versus producing a horse that may or may not have the capacity, mannerisms and smarts to become a good ranch horse.

Horses, like any living thing, need time to mature. The costs of growing a horse to maturity are high. Buy a good, mature horse and leave the breeding and training to the experts. It's not cheap to raise a good ranch horse.

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.

Annual Horse Costs

Mare and Foal	\$797
Young Horses	\$481

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2006 direct costs.