THE UNWANTED HORSE IN THE U.S.

The horse industry has undertaken many new and successful initiatives over the last decade to address the issue of unwanted horses. Adoption programs, education about responsible ownership, and increased rescue and retirement options have all helped create a better life for horses that were previously without a caregiver. However, each year, despite these efforts, thousands of horses end their days without a job, unneeded, unusable, and unwanted.

Many of the 170,000 unwanted horses in the U.S. are healthy horses that become more of a burden to their owners than a blessing because of financial limitations, time constraints, or otherwise failing to meet expectations. These horses can often be repurposed and rehomed. Others may be sick, injured, or old. Fewer still are unmanageable, unridable, or dangerous.

Regardless of how these horses reach this state, it is the responsibility of owners—and the equine industry at large—to prevent horses from becoming unwanted. To ignore the problem puts the horses' welfare at risk and can drain industry resources. Luckily, the problem of the unwanted horse is recognized by equine organizations, businesses, and individuals alike, and is one for which numerous industry groups are currently working towards a solution.

The Unwanted Horse Coalition is one of these groups.

The mission of the Unwanted Horse Coalition is to reduce the number of unwanted horses and to improve their welfare through education and industry collaboration.
OWN RESPONSIBLY
Who is responsible for these unwanted horses?

We Are.

It is the job of every individual and organization involved in the equine industry to learn to own responsibly.

What does that mean?

To “own responsibly” means many things, but fundamentally it means that before you buy or breed a horse, you understand how it affects you and the horse, both in the present and in the future. To own responsibly means that you, as that horse’s owner and provider, understand and consider all options available to your horse including sale, lease, donation, adoption, retirement, and alternative programs and uses. It means that you consider end-of-life decisions, including veterinary care, euthanasia, and disposal, before that time comes. And it means that the industry must continue to work together to find a solution to this problem.

GOALS OF THE UNWANTED HORSE COALITION

The Unwanted Horse Coalition is committed to helping unwanted horses by:

• Educating current and future horse owners on how to own responsibly, on proper care and breeding, and on options available before a horse becomes unwanted
• Raising awareness of the unwanted horse issue and its consequences to horses and the horse industry
• Reducing the number of unwanted horses and working toward eliminating the problem
• Ensuring that horses are treated humanely and with dignity
• Facilitating the exchange of information regarding adoption, care, and alternative careers
• Providing information on end-of-life decisions, including veterinary care, euthanasia, and disposal
• Explaining the issue through presentations at industry gatherings, such as symposiums, expos, and horse fairs

HELP US HELP THE UNWANTED HORSES

The UHC is funded by its member organizations and by donations from caring individuals and groups. If you would like to help decrease the number of unwanted horses, please make a tax deductible donation through the American Horse Council Foundation, a non-profit Section 501(c)(3) organization.

MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM THE UHC

The biggest challenge that the equine industry faces is involving all equine-related organizations, associations, and events in the effort to solve the unwanted horse issue. The UHC’s current effort in spreading the word through educational materials, news, and programs is an attempt to get more individuals and organizations thinking about and understanding the issues at hand.

The UHC provides a variety of educational materials on both the website, unwantedhorsecoalition.org, and in print, free of charge.

• The UHC handbook, Own Responsibly: Guidance for Current and Potential Horse Owners, includes detailed chapters on the responsibilities of horse ownership; options for owners with unwanted horses; important questions to ask when trying to place a horse; programs that extend the useful lives of horses; and the tax ramifications of contributing your horse to a charitable organization.
• The UHC handbook, Join the Effort: Programs to Help Unwanted Horses, provides examples of initiatives and activities that organizations can undertake to help reduce the number of unwanted horses.
• Own Responsibly Flyers describe what it means to act responsibly regarding the long-term needs of your horse.
• The 2009 Unwanted Horses Survey details the results of a national survey taken by more than 27,000 horse owners, equine industry stakeholders, rescue and retirement facilities, and non-horse owners regarding the causes, solutions, and implications of the unwanted horse problem.
• The Preventing Unwanted Horses: Geld and Spay brochure, created as a supplement to the UHC’s highly successful Operation Gelding program, highlights the benefits of gelding and spaying as these practices pertain to equine health and responsible horse ownership.

The UHC continues to spread the word about unwanted horses through the UHC Roundup. The newsletter is sent out via e-mail and contains articles that detail what organizations in the community are doing to understand and help solve the unwanted horse problem. It reports on the activities within the UHC, industry program highlights, and individual success stories.

OPERATION GELDING

One of the UHC’s most successful programs, Operation Gelding provides funds and materials to assist organizations and groups that wish to host low-cost or free clinics in which horse owners can have their stallions castrated by a certified veterinarian. The impetus for these clinics is that the castration of a stallion will help prevent overbreeding, in turn reducing the number of unwanted horses. Castration will also produce a gentler horse that is more ridable, trainable, salable, and adoptable, allowing him to be used in several careers.

The UHC provides information and forms necessary to conduct a clinic, along with seed money to defray the costs. Funds of $50 per horse gelded, with a $1,000 maximum, will be awarded to participating groups once in a 12-month period.

Any organization or group is invited to participate in the Operation Gelding program. The UHC wants to involve as many groups as possible. Past groups have included veterinary schools, equine rescue, and 4-H clubs.

Since its inception in 2010, Operation Gelding has assisted in castrating over 1,550 stallions.