

HORSE AND PASTURE MANAGEMENT 101: LOCAL CLASSES OFFERED IN MAY AND JUNE

by Paul J. Pugliese



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The number of horses in Georgia is steadily climbing, nearing an estimated 250,000 in recent years, according to Dr. Gary Heusner, UGA Extension Equine Specialist. It is estimated that the Georgia horse industry has a \$1 billion economic impact annually. The 2006 Georgia Farm Gate Value Report published by the University of Georgia Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development ranks horses as 6th among 60 agricultural commodities. This ranking is based on estimates of money generated from the boarding,

training, breeding and raising of horses. Cherokee County annually ranks in the top six counties in Georgia as having the largest number of horses. The recent horse boom most likely is attributed to the increase in Georgia's population and the economic boom of the late 1990s.

Horse riding is the kind of leisure activity people like to take part in when they feel financially secure. It seems that when the economy is good, everyone with a few acres wants to buy a horse. Georgia's relatively low cost of living and a temperate climate that allows for year-round outdoor riding factor into the increase too. Georgia's horse industry isn't just growing larger; it's growing more diverse too. The state attracts thoroughbred breeders and has some of the nation's best training stables.

What does all this mean? Generally, it means that there are some concerns for the safety of the new horses and a growing need for basic knowledge on horse care and pasture management — especially in times of drought.

Because the number of horses grew so quickly, there really isn't a support system in place to provide information to all the new horse owners. There really just aren't enough horse educators across the state or enough veterinarians with horse experience to keep up with the demand. The educational need hasn't gone unnoticed at the college level.

Almost all of UGA's new animal science majors are coming from a horse background. Also, in response to the increase in equine related calls at local county extension offices, the UGA Cooperative Extension program in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has been developing a "Master Equine Management Training Course" to be offered to the general public in Georgia. This program will be offered for the first time in Northwest Georgia from May to June in 2008!

An overview of this training course includes: Economics of the Industry; Feeding and Nutrition; Waste Handling; Horse Health; Barn Design and Facilities Management; Soil, Water and Pasture Management; Environmental Concerns; Arena Maintenance, Legal and Liability Issues; and Economics and Budgeting. If you are interested in taking this Master Equine course, the series will be offered weekly on Thursdays, May 8 through June 12 from 6:30 — 9 p.m. at the Bartow County Extension office in Cartersville. Registration for this program will begin on April 1 and end May 1. Call the USDA Rolling Hills RC&D Council at (770) 749-0444 to register or find out more about the program.

To learn more about caring for horses and pasture management, contact your local county extension office or check out our UGA resources and publications online at www.georgiaforages.com.

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