

# University Pleasure Horse Programs

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Old Dobbin is on the comeback trail but Old Dobbin has a new look to match the new frontiers and a new way of life in America.

The attendance at this Horse Clinic is ample evidence of the fact that there is widespread and enthusiastic interest in horses for pleasure. While tractor power has largely taken the place of horse power on our farms for heavy work, increases have taken place in the number of horses for pleasure and sport all over this country. Interest in pleasure horses is now at an all time high and it is my observation and belief, supported by limited availability of data to be sure, that numbers of pleasure horses are at an all time high as well. Recently, an estimate was given to me by a reliable source that in Fairfield County in this state there are over 5,000 head of horses and ponies. In just the last few years, the number of 4H horse projects in this little state has mushroomed so that we now have over 1300 in this program. This is more than in our 4H Dairy, Beef, Sheep and

Swine programs combined. We are not unique in its respect, for in state after state, the growth of 4H horse projects in the last ten years has been nothing less than phenomenal. This has also been the case for horse breed associations, riding clubs, trail ride organizations and numbers of horses and horse people participating in polo, cutting contests, racing horse shows and just for fun on horseback. In addition the stock horse for working cattle and sheep continues to fill an important spot on many of our farms and ranches.

The census of horses on farms and ranches in the United States doesn't tell the story. Many, many thousands of horses and ponies are not included in the farm census because they have their home on terra firma outside of the census definition of a farm. It would be very helpful if we could know just exactly what has happened and is happening relative to the numbers of light horses.

Horses are going back to college! Not so long ago, most every land grant college was in the draft horse business. They used them for their teaching and research programs in Animal Husbandry and work on the college farms. With the changing times and the impact of mechanization and the tractor on agriculture, these colleges went out of draft horse programs. A few already had a pleasure horse program, a few

others switched to it as they shifted out of draft horses. Many had no horses on the campus for several years. Several still don't, but they are coming back at many of the colleges over the country. It wouldn't surprise me at all if someday they are almost as numerous on college campuses as were draft horses of an earlier era. It will be slow or not at all on some campuses where materialistic agricultural thinking may believe that horses are not a part of agriculture because you can't or should not eat them. But, there is more to the good life than bread alone. One of our reasons for a broad and liberal as well as technical education is to build up an appreciation for the social, biological and physical world in which we live. If music, art, flowers, nursery crops, landscaping, the great works of literature and a multitude of other such studies have a place in University programs. Then so do horse programs which are well directed. These areas add zest, balance, understanding and appreciation and pleasure to our workaday world for many, and a career and business as well for others.

Some will argue that a university should not have just a horse farm and a spot on Sundays for the equine loving visitor. With them, I would be the first to agree. Universities exist for two primary purposes — teaching and

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research. If university horses are fully used in such programs, they can be as completely justified as other areas in well balanced universities and it then is not a horse farm or barn — it is a horse laboratory or a horse teaching and research center.

With the growth in horse interest and numbers, there are an increasing number of opportunities for careers related in whole or in part to horses. People own horses and when they do, questions and job opportunities arise on breeding, feeding, management, training, equitation, organization activities, promotion, teaching and research. The county agent, vo-ag teacher, 4H club agent and feed company fieldman, to name but a few, are called on for horse information. It helps their program and their *raison d'être* when they can supply it. It is my belief that every animal husbandry or animal science major in college today should have at least one good three-credit course on

horse production and those with a strong interest should have more available. Horses themselves are as essential to the teaching of Horse courses as a Chemistry laboratory is to the lecture material in that science.

The teaching program with horses at land grant universities in Animal Industries Departments should be directed at two groups of students. There should be a core of courses on horses or related thereto for Animal Science or Animal Husbandry majors. These people may eventually own, research, manage and educate on horse programs or they may be in related business or educational activities. Then if possible, there should be at least one service course, primarily designed for students not in Animal Husbandry. This will serve another strong interest group. It should be more than just horseback riding for if it is only that, it is doubtful that it should merit any college credit. So much for justification and generalities.

What about our specific program at the University of Connecticut? We have made progress. Yet, we have a

long way to go. We have some aspirations and tentative plans which we hope can be implemented. We will welcome your interest and support in helping us to build a better program.

We keep about thirty head of light horses of all ages. Only about 18 of these are mature. We need more. Most of them are Morgans. We grew into this breed because they were readily available as a result of some cooperation from the United States Morgan Horse Farm. We use our horses a great deal. I have stated previously and, in my opinion, it is still true that we use our horses more in our teaching program per animal unit maintained than any other class of livestock on our campus. That doesn't mean that others are not well used. It does mean that our horse numbers are relatively low and the demand great.

We have one service course — Pleasure Horse Use and Appreciation — in which our enrollment is up to the capacity of seven sections offered each semester. In the course of the year,

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there are about 140 students in this course. That's all we can handle with other commitments and our present staff. The interesting fact to you will be that for the last three years, we have had two to three times that number of students request the course. These students are maors in nursing, arts, engineering, social science, home economics and business, and from every area in the University.

What is in this course? To be sure, there is some riding but that is far from all of it. I seriously doubt that more than a small percentage of the staff members of the College of Agriculture could pass the many quizzes and exams in this course if they picked them up today. Subjects touched on include horses and their place; the breeds of horses; horse anatomy; psychology and physiology; tack care; feeding principles; and the management of the saddle horse. Critics of the course see only the students on horseback and think it must be a "gut" but the grade

distribution doesn't indicate it. In addition to the information received from this course by the student, I suspect that one of the major values of it to a non-agriculturally oriented student enrollment is an increased appreciation of the place, possibilities and some of the problems of agriculture.

For our major students, we have one specific horse course available in our two-year program, and two courses plus a special problems elective, in our four-year degree program. In both our two year and four year programs, supporting courses are available in breeding, nutrition, parasitology, animal diseases, agronomy, agricultural economics, plant science and forage crops, as well as the other classes of farm livestock. In our four-year degree program, we try to develop a broadminded specialist. We recognize that we cannot turn out experts but instead we can perhaps build a foundation and a stimulus, so that expert status may be more quickly achieved. The first two years of our four year program are largely spent in acquiring a broad and liberal education. There are, of course, introduc-

tory courses available in agriculture during this period. In the last two years, we encourage concentration in certain areas; yet, with individual counseling, we build a program for each student that is oriented toward business, science, education or technology. We encourage students to gain experience during summers. We welcome students from Connecticut and out-of-state as well.

If all we had to do was to teach our one service course, we wouldn't have any reason for conducting a breeding program and developing and training young stock, but these programs are as essential to us as hatching drosophila in our Genetics laboratories or working with equipment in Engineering. They are most helpful and desirable if we are to serve our major students. Last year, we had 48 students in the three horse courses we offered to our majors. That doesn't sound like much compared with the 140 in the service course but the majors had a total of 114 student credit hours as compared with 140 student credit hours for the service course. We had to develop an extra laboratory session in

one of our major courses in order to do a good job.

In addition to teaching as indicated above, we have short courses or clinics, such as this one. This is our third one this year. We have a section in our one-week animal breeding short course devoted to horses. We work with visiting clubs and groups on special programs such as judging, management, etc.

We have been so busy with teaching with our limited horses and our limited staff that we haven't been able to conduct much research. We would like to. There is a paucity of information on nutrition of the light horse. Very little has been done on it. We are applying draft horse information to light horse nutrition, which may not be a valid thing to do. There are many other areas of research with horses which need work. We do have one project under way in which we will be using stallion semen, along with semen from our other farm animals.

*What about the future?* Most of what I am about to say consists of hopes and desires for our program

here and is bounded by my own limitations and undoubtedly biased viewpoint. We need to increase our horse numbers so as to better serve our majors and our service courses and so as to initiate some needed research. We could make full use of about 45 horses, of which about 25 to 30 should be in the mature category. Our riding has been primarily with the English saddles. This is fine. But a few laboratory sections on the so-called Western style would be very popular and are needed for balance of program. The Western saddle, in contrast to what the name implies, is not provincial in its use or popularity. It abounds in all regions. Horse people know that western training of a horse is different than the English training of a horse. With some increases and another instructor we could double our students in our service course.

To strengthen our program, I hope that facilities and budgets will some day permit us to increase the kinds of horses we maintain. It would be particularly helpful in our laboratories and programs if we could add to our Mor-

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gans a good five-gaited horse or two; a couple of hunters which could clear four feet with ease; and yes, some quarter horses, for they are, by far, the most popular breed in this country. We wouldn't have to conduct breeding programs with necessarily more than one breed. However, the others would add much to our offering as they were used in our class work.

Beyond our course work, we need to develop an experience gaining extra-curricular type of program with some of our most enthusiastic students, such as an equestrian (enne) team or a drill team, or a western riding or English riding competition group.

We need the personnel to conduct extension programs and short courses on horses. Can you imagine what the attendance might be at a short course on horses given in the winter one night a week, for say six or ten or sixteen weeks in Hartford, New Haven, Danbury and in Torrington? My guess is that we would definitely have to limit the enrollment because of such a great demand.

We need your help, your interest and your suggestions, and those from other similar groups to help us have one of the very best horse programs of any land grant college. We have a fair start. We can be much better. There is certainly room for several colleges to develop strength in horse teaching and research.

I have tried to bring the picture into focus on horses in college work and to indicate something of the future. I believe that it is important for universities to have programs which train the specialists, but that they should be broadminded specialists with an appreciation for our world and its society and its problems, pleasures, and possibilities. I repeat that life is more than bread alone. If there is a place for art on our walls, music in our halls and flowers in our green houses and all of learning which adds to a fuller life, then there is a place for horses in university programs.

We want to have a high quality horse program here. We will keep upper-most the primary reasons for the existence of a horse laboratory on a university campus. These are teaching and research.