

Can't care for your horse? What can you do?

Are you a horse owner who can't afford to feed and care for your horse? A conservative estimate of the monthly cost is more than \$100 per horse for food alone – not counting veterinary and farrier (shoer) bills. You simply don't have it, and the horse can be expected to live – and require food and care – until about age 30.

What are your options?

- **Sell the horse to a willing buyer.** There is still a strong market for the top horses – those that are high quality, sound, athletic, and trained, with years of usefulness ahead of them. Otherwise, particularly if the horse is aged or unsound, your chances are not good. There are a lot of those, and transportation more than a few miles away may be prohibitive.. You may not even be able to give the horse away.
- **Donate the horse to a charity** such as a therapeutic riding group, police department, equine college or university. They are unlikely to be interested in a horse that is of no value to a private buyer.
- **Send the horse to an equine rescue** or retirement facility. These are overfilled, underfunded, and at least in New Mexico, being pressured to take (without compensation) additional horses seized by the Livestock Board or local authorities.
- **Turn it out on public land** to fend for itself. This is illegal. Competition with other animals is severe, making chances of survival poor, and death by injury, disease or starvation is not what anyone wants.
- **Keep it and let it starve.** This is illegal animal abuse. Temporary, short-term assistance may be available from www.equineprotectionfund.org.
- **Care for it at the expense of your family.** This is illegal domestic abuse.
- **Have the horse humanely euthanized¹.** Done legally (by a veterinarian with proper disposal of the carcass by rendering or at a landfill) this will cost several hundred dollars. Some authorities hold that it is illegal animal abuse if the horse is healthy.
- **Send it to an auction.** In most cases, this means that the horse will be sold on for **slaughter²**. Because there are currently no legal slaughter facilities in the United States, horses destined for slaughter must be shipped to Mexico or Canada. Neither the transport nor the slaughter can be assured to be humane.

You aren't alone. There are thousands of horse owners currently in this situation. There are also many apparently ownerless horses on public and tribal lands. The numbers are reported to be in the tens of thousands, and a census would cost at least a million dollars. This amount of money might be better spent in other ways.

What's the answer?

- **Reduce the number of horses born.** This is a viable long-term strategy, and NMHC supports and contributes to Operation Gelding, but the effect won't be seen for years. Reputable breeders of all the major registered equine breeds in the United States have already cut their production dramatically, but casual or accidental breeding continues mostly unchecked.
- **Increase funding for equine rescues.** A positive option, and the tax refund check off program can help but will deal with only a small fraction of the problem. \$30,000 would feed the current population at equine rescues for less than one month.
- **Allow domestic horse slaughter.** Nobody would be forced to send a horse to slaughter, and the processing plants would be inspected and regulated by the USDA.
- **Pray for a miracle,** or at least for the revelation of an alternative that no one else has seen.
- **Ignore the laws and the math,** and allow things to continue as they are now.

There is no solution that will satisfy all parties, and a requirement to do so would make the problem insoluble. The options actually available may be repugnant to many, but we are dealing with living, breathing, eating creatures, and **we can't just "do nothing"**.

1. **Euthanasia** – defined by Webster as painless killing to relieve suffering; the act or practice of killing an animal that has an incurable illness or injury. Note: almost no part is usable for another purpose.

2. **Slaughter** – defined by Webster as the killing of animals for their meat and other products. Note: almost all parts are usable.