



The World Needs Ranch Horses

In today's world, a very precious few things are as relevant—much less as vital—as they were a century ago. However, the horse, as an essential tool of the trade and working partner for ranchers, has rather uniquely stood the test of time.

On ranches across the country, the horse remains an invaluable, irreplaceable asset in the mission to feed America, and the world. It is safe to say that very few people today realize that their daily lives are affected by something seemingly as anachronistic as a ranch horse. However, even people that don't eat meat benefit directly from ranching—and from cowboys and their trusted horses-- because of the myriad of byproducts of meat production that are found in hundreds of commonly used items.

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Modern Beef Production – Sustainable and Streamlined

Modern American beef production is one of the most naturally sustainable and streamlined sectors of agriculture. Cattle ranching is the first step in the process. Ranchers own cattle and raise calves to be sold into the beef market. Cattle, as well as sheep, can be raised in arid and rugged areas completely unsuitable for farming. They convert raw otherwise unusable forage into nutritious food and byproducts that humans can utilize. It is also very important to note that properly managed grazing works in harmony with the ecosystem, and can greatly benefit the environment in several ways, such as sequestering carbon and mitigating wildfire risk.

Horses Play an Important Role in Beef Production

For centuries, ranches have relied on horses to help move and manage livestock in mountainous, rough areas that are otherwise inaccessible, even by today's motorized vehicles. Riding horses allow ranchers to not only cover rocky or brushy country effectively and efficiently, but in the eventuality that a cow needs veterinary care, also to safely, humanely catch, restrain, and treat her, quite literally in the middle of nowhere, without the aid of corrals or chutes. This allows the rancher to treat the injured or sick cow as quickly as possible while minimizing the amount of stress she is under.

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The value of quiet, efficient stockmanship cannot be overstated. A horse can move quietly through a herd without disturbing cattle as his rider examines the cows for any issues. A capable or “handy” rider mounted on a willing and well-trained horse can accomplish much in a short time, even a long way from any type of corral or livestock handling facility. In the photo above, the heifer (young cow) has been safely caught and restrained so the cowboy can administer necessary medication. The horse knows to keep the rope taut and the heifer under control until the job is done.

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The horse is far more than a vehicle, however. Cowboys rely on their horses' senses and instinct in numerous scenarios. Many ranch breeding programs across the country raise horses in the same terrain and conditions that they will work in later, making them keenly attuned to their environment and therefore incomparable working partners. A horse naturally senses danger much more quickly than a person does, whether it be treacherous ground or a nearby predator. His sharp senses serve in other ways as well; horses see, hear, and smell things long before humans can, whether it's another rider approaching from miles away or a missing calf bedded down in the brush. A good cowboy knows to watch where his horse watches.

Ranch Horses are Highly Trained and Sought After

The many and varied experiences had by young ranch horses work to develop the blend of prowess and level-headedness ranch horses are known for.

The traits of such seasoned horses are essential for the rancher and working cowboy. In addition, the horses' abilities are of substantial financial value in the worldwide horse market. The demand for true ranch horses is strong, since they can easily transition to any number of purposes for both competitive and recreational riders. Thus, the raising, training and selling of horses from a ranch's breeding program is a great way for ranchers to diversify and improve their operation's overall profitability.

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Just as numerous ranches are multigenerational, a great many ranch horse breeding programs are too. There is immense value in this, not only for the ranchers, but potential ranch horse buyers as well. Ranchers have a deep understanding of the horses they raise and their lineage. It inspires and merits great buyer confidence when a ranch horse breeder knows the traits, strengths, and weaknesses not only a horse itself, but of its sire and dam (parents) and other ancestors. The value of this is evident in ranch horse sales across the country, where finished horses frequently command prices in the tens of thousands of dollars.

The horsemanship necessary to mold young horses into productive partners is an art in and of itself; rodeo and horse shows are a testament to that fact. The skills necessary in a ranch horse and the competitions based upon them comprise a massive sector of the horse industry. Passing the knowledge, training methods, and love for the equine down to future generations is an integral part of ranch horse breeding programs, and thus, the continued success of many multigenerational family ranches as young people follow in their parents' and grandparents' footsteps.



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Rancher/Ranch Horse Relationship Is Far From One-Sided

All of that said, it is important to understand that the human/ranch horse relationship is far from one-sided. A wise old cowboy once said: “A horse needs two things—something to eat and something to do.” The truth of this can be seen on any number of ranches across the nation, where the hard-working, purpose-bred horses meet their riders at the gate, eager for human companionship and the day’s work ahead.



Extremist Groups Seek to Destroy the Horse Industry

The sad reality is that despite the age-old symbiotic relationship between human and horse and the essential role it plays in our food production system today, animal extremist groups are actively campaigning to end any type of animal use.

Former Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) executive Wayne Pacelle infamously stated, “we have no problem with the extinction of domestic animals.”

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Patrick Battuelo, founder of the group Horseracing Wrongs, stated:

“...Tracks will close/consolidate over time (like what’s happening now); with that, businessmen being businessmen, less breeding. In other words, the racehorse population will gradually decrease according to time-tested economic principles. When the time arrives for the last track, or cluster of tracks, to close, there will be ample funds to “re-home” what’s left. Then, sterilize to extinction – a planet devoid of Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Standardbreds, and everything in between...”

Even if a person has never seen a horse in person, has never had a pet of any kind, and even may choose not to eat meat, the broad attack on animal use and ownership affects them. It profoundly affects *everyone*. The ability for ranchers to saddle their horses and go to work out on the land, producing high quality food and byproducts is not mere nostalgic Americana—it is a very real, very necessary component in safely, sustainably, and affordably feeding a hungry nation and maintaining quality of life in the 21st century.

Several of our Western Justice staff members are multigenerational ranchers that breed, raise, and train our own ranch horses. We know firsthand how incredibly important and valuable they are to our livelihood. This is one of the many reasons we seek to represent the horse industry in legislative policy situations and educate the general public on horse related topics.

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