

UF/IFAS Florida Equine Institute & Allied Trade Show

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Narrative

A recent study of horse owners uncovered a fundamental lack of knowledge regarding good animal husbandry practices (Williams et al., 2018). This ignorance may cause unintentional mistreatment of animals and leads to higher costs associated with feed and health care. There is a need for Extension intervention to teach horse owners how to be better stewards of their horse's health, wellness, and farmland in which they operate. This was achieved by the University of Florida Central Florida Livestock Agents Group (CFLAG) developing this annual equine program, the Florida Equine Institute & Allied Trade Show. This event is held in high esteem by horse owners across Florida and other states for the quality of information as well as the way in which the information is presented. This program provides a great opportunity for faculty collaboration amongst UF/IFAS state and county faculty, faculty from other institutions, and industry professionals. Along with the educational component of this program is an allied industry trade show, where participants have a chance to stop by various booths set up by industry representatives to discuss products and services offered to them.

Educational Objectives

The Florida Equine Institute strives to enhance the management of the horse as well as the land and environment with educational topics covering equine health and management, horse handling, equine nutritional management, equine behavioral science, and pasture management on horse farms. Short term objectives include knowledge gain on the topics presented and long-term objectives being adoption of the practices taught for improved wellbeing of the horse and the environment the horse is reared on. Program goals are 60% knowledge gain as indicated by post program surveys and 40% of participants adopting at least one recommended practice by the six-month follow up survey.

Learning objectives-

- Improve feeding of horses by learning how to feed to meet nutritional needs.
- Understand the benefits of forage based equine diets.
- Understand vaccination schedules, parasite management, and first-aid protocols.
- Learn how to interpret equine behavior for better training and wellbeing of the horse.
- Improve pasture management by soil sampling prior to fertilization and pasture improvement.
- Implement Best Management Practices such as managing manure and developing a grazing plan.
- Understand how to manage forage resources.
- Pasture weed identification and management.

Program Activities

This annual event has occurred for over 20 years, with improved direction and planning during the past 3 years. This event thrives from key-note lectures, bite-sized topic roundtables, and experiential learning. This is a 6-hour program that covers 4-6 topics, has 2 tradeshow intermissions, and a live animal demonstration with a full catered lunch. Topics are driven by the attendees, the program planning committee uses feedback from the previous year to build the agenda for the current year.

Trade show sponsors have an opportunity to submit give-a-way items each year. At the end of the program, pending their submission of evaluations and program surveys, participants are entered to win these items. This is our way of enticing participation in the program evaluation and survey.

The allied industry trade show is a great way to connect equine clientele to other professionals in the area that can provide services and knowledge to their farms. Upholding these allied relationships is vital for Extension as we seek to maintain our position as the unbiased, research-based education and outreach tool for farm owners. These industry representatives send a lot of clients to Extension, because they are aware of the service we provide as educators.

Participants like to take something home with them, so with registration to the program they receive a proceedings booklet that is designed in-kind from a local print store. This booklet contains additional information on each of the topics presented, with an area for them to take notes during the program. This book also has contact information for UF/IFAS faculty and the vendors in the trade show.

Teaching Methods

This program is a collaborative effort of various faculty at UF/IFAS Extension and other institutions depending upon the expertise needed for the agenda. Keeping the participants engaged is key, classroom-style lectures are intertwined with small sessions and interactive breakout lectures. The key-note lectures are one hour, with all other topics ranging from 15-45 minutes in length. Power points, guided notes, hands-on demonstrations, and panel discussions are the primary teaching methods.

This program also fosters a sense of community as participants are put into breakout groups at random and new relationships are built throughout the day. Participants are encouraged to interact during the program and ask questions to get one-on-one help from UF/IFAS faculty. In 2019 the Expert Panel was introduced, where participants had the chance to submit their equine questions throughout the day to a question box and the final agenda item of the program was a moderated Q&A session with invited UF Equine Science faculty members of various expertise. This was a popular concept that also encouraged people to stay for the entirety of the program.

Program Results

Since 2018 451 people have attended this program, 92% of participants indicated knowledge gain on at least one topic and 88% of participants indicated at least one practice change on their farms in the following areas:

- Equine nutrition management- 91%
- Forage based equine diets- 78%
- Make sure horses are up to date on vaccinations- 78%
- Use equine behavior for better training and wellbeing of the horse- 70%
- Improve pasture management by soil sampling prior to fertilization and pasture improvement- 82%
- Implement Best Management Practices such as managing manure- 57%
- Manage forage via grazing management, weed management, and the appropriate field inputs- 71%

73% of respondents indicated saving money because of this program in the areas of reduced feeding costs or prevention of death loss from toxic plants in the pasture. This program has generated \$7,700 in sponsorships since 2018 with overall revenue of \$11,800 for the past three years.

Evaluation

Post-program surveys were used as an incentive to be entered into the drawing for giveaway items. This approach kept our return rate over 50% each year. These surveys assessed knowledge gain based on knowledge of topics prior to the event and after as well as general satisfaction of the event. The surveys also evaluated the likelihood of a participant to adopt management practices on their farms. Six months later, online surveys using Qualtrics were sent to participants to target actual practice change, response rates are generally lower. Incentivizing participants to complete the online surveys with a chance to win free admission to the next year's program might help participation.

Impact Statement

By providing equine enthusiasts this program as a tool to improve their farm and animal management, they will reduce production costs and environmental impairment associated with horse farms, which will lead to healthier animals at a lower cost and the longevity of natural resources such as water which is greatly impacted by agriculture management practices.