

Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium: Does a change in venue impact the perception of learning?

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Introduction

The need for scientific-based horse owner education was identified through a statewide survey conducted in 2015. The Southern Arizona Equine Health Symposium was created when Arizona Cooperative Extension approached local veterinarians to partner on meeting this need. The first symposium was held in 2017 and has continued annually. In 2025 and 2026 the symposium was moved and rebranded ("The Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium") due to venue and partnership shifts and held at the Al-Marrah Equine Center in Tucson, AZ (1/25/25). While the location and collaborating veterinarian groups changed, the core organizational structure remained consistent. The schedule (Figure 1) was adapted to the new facilities, which included one lecture-style set up and an indoor arena used for both lecture and/or demonstrations which enhanced presenter interaction during demonstrations.

The new Al-Marrah venue facilitated university student involvement in various event support roles and presentations, however there were limitations on bringing in outside horses, as well as receptivity to clinicians demonstrating on horses. Therefore, the 10th annual symposium (January 24-25, 2026), was held at Al-Marrah Equine Center on the first day and at a privately owned facility on the second day. The addition of the private facility in 2026 on Day 2, greatly enhanced the ability to incorporate outside horse/rider/trainer demonstrations while decreasing friction with university regulations. Both the 2025 and 2026 symposiums had over 100 participants who had options between 15+ lectures and demonstrations led by equine experts and veterinarians. New methods to provide a better close-up view of demonstrations using iPad/iphone projected live to the projector screen via a zoom meeting (2025: dental exam/float, 2026: leg wrapping, saddle fit, and hoof radiographs/trimming) were very well received. This change was identified as a "crowd favorite" addition in the evaluations.

Materials and Methods

Attendees were provided paper-based evaluations (Figure 2) with all presentations (attendees circle one for each time slot) and demographic questions. Evaluation completion/return is incentivized by random drawing of door prizes at the end of the day. The survey assessed the usefulness of information for horse care, intended behavioral changes, instructor effectiveness, and knowledge gained per presentation (before and after) using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1-very little to 5-very much). Attendees were asked knowledge gain questions after the presentation, to allow them to rate learning after hearing the new information. While an electronic option has been available, paper forms were predominantly used. The demographics gathered include horse/land ownership, prior participation in University of Arizona equine extension programs, website visits, etc. Paper survey response data was entered into Qualtrics, and summary statistics and correlations among demographic and response variables were generated via Microsoft Excel and SAS v9.4, respectively.

Figure 1: 2026 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium Schedule.

Results and Discussion

Attendee number and survey completion rate

- ✓ 2025: 44% evaluation completion rate (53/120); 2026: 30% evaluation completion rate (32/108)
- ✓ The 2-day format provided an evaluation challenge since surveys were the same format for consistency, but collection was spread over 2 days. Individual survey sets were numbered, so that separated pages could be reunited.

Figure 2: 2026 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium Evaluation.

Kendall Tau b Correlation Coefficients Prob > tau H0: Tau=0 Number of Observations			
	Handout	Informed	Value
Satisfaction	r=-0.422 p<0.002 n=50	r=0.530 p<0.001 n=50	r=0.478 p<0.001 n=50
Handout		r=0.532 p<0.001 n=50	r=0.496 p<0.001 n=51
Informed			r=0.363 p<0.004 n=50

Table 1: Correlations among demographic and symposium satisfaction from the 2025 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium.

Kendall Tau b Correlation Coefficients Prob > tau H0: Tau=0 Number of Observations			
	Handout	Informed	Value
Satisfaction	r=0.554 p<0.002 n=32	r=0.296 p<0.1 n=31	r=-0.124 p<0.5 n=32
Handout		r=0.351 p<0.06 n=30	r=0.553 p<0.002 n=31
Informed			r=0.167 p<0.3 n=30

Table 2: Correlations among demographic and symposium satisfaction from the 2026 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium.

Correlations among demographic and symposium satisfaction variables

- ✓ Number of acres owned/leased was positively correlated with distance traveled in both 2025 (0.312; p=0.020) and 2026 (0.403; p=0.018). Possibilities for this could be the fact that the further from Tucson an attendee traveled, the more acreage that would be available to own or lease, or the more land/horses they owned, the more vested interest they may have in learning.
- ✓ All metrics (program satisfaction, materials/handout satisfaction, improved decision making, and value for cost were all positively correlated with each other in 2025 (Table 1), but not 2026 (Table 2). The change from a 1-day to a 2-day event did increase the registration price between 2025 and 2026, and the first day was shortened from 8 hours to 6 hours, which may account for this difference.

Presentation usefulness and clarity, and attendee plans to change

- ✓ In general, topics were considered useful and well-presented (Figures 3 and 4 for 2025 and 2026, respectively), with intent to change horse care and/or farm management practices also ranked 'agree' or 'strongly agree'.
- ✓ Lower scores for behavior change relative to presentation satisfaction scores were observed for sessions that were presented in a "round robin" format, including more basic hands-on activities (e.g., vital signs, leg wrapping, conformation, etc.).
- ✓ In some cases, the plan to change might not apply due to attendees who did not own horses or already incorporated the skills with their horses/farms, which potentially decreased the score. Providing a "not applicable" choice may have given a clearer picture.

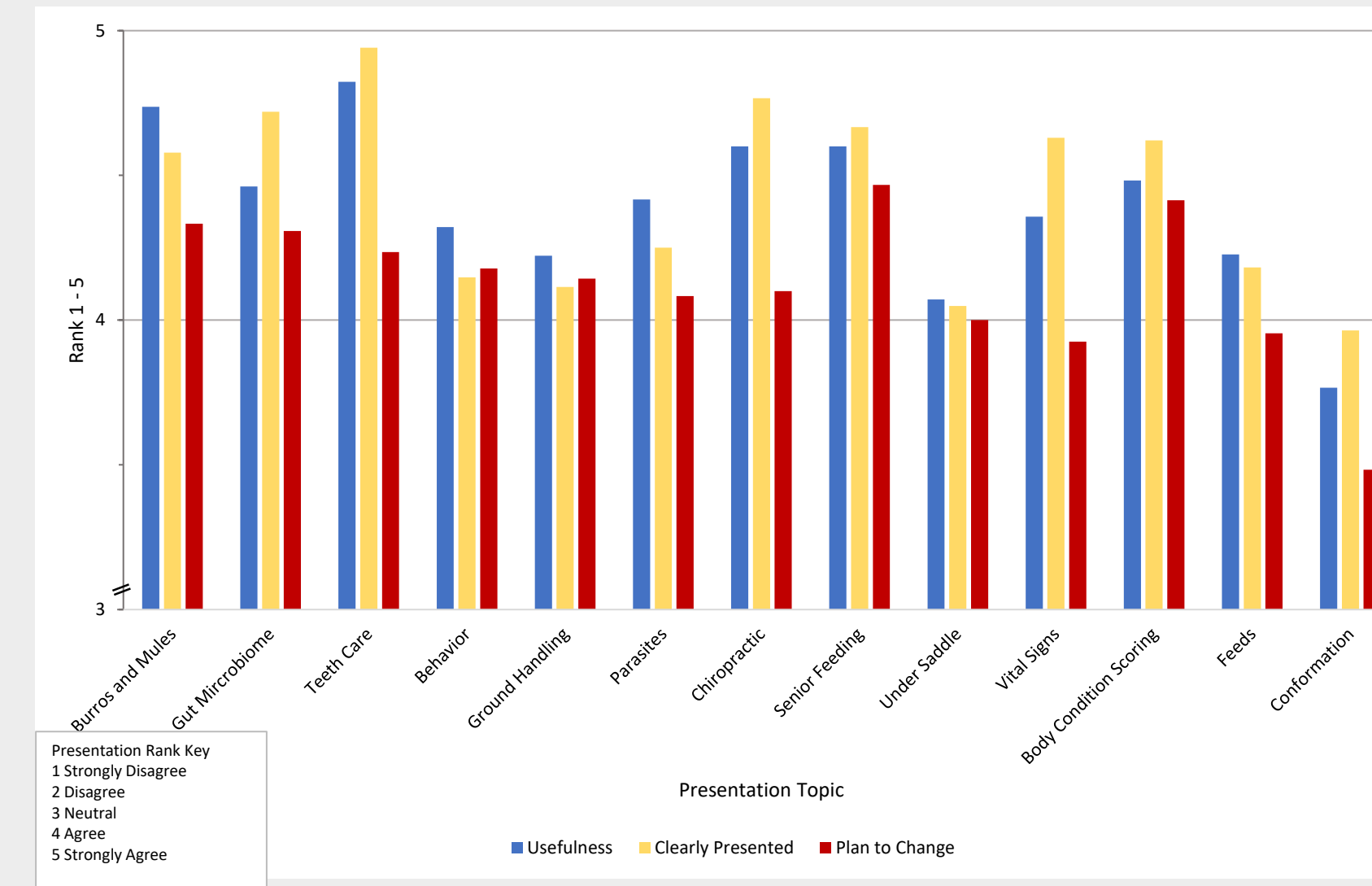


Figure 3: Perception of presentation value by attendees at the 2025 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium.

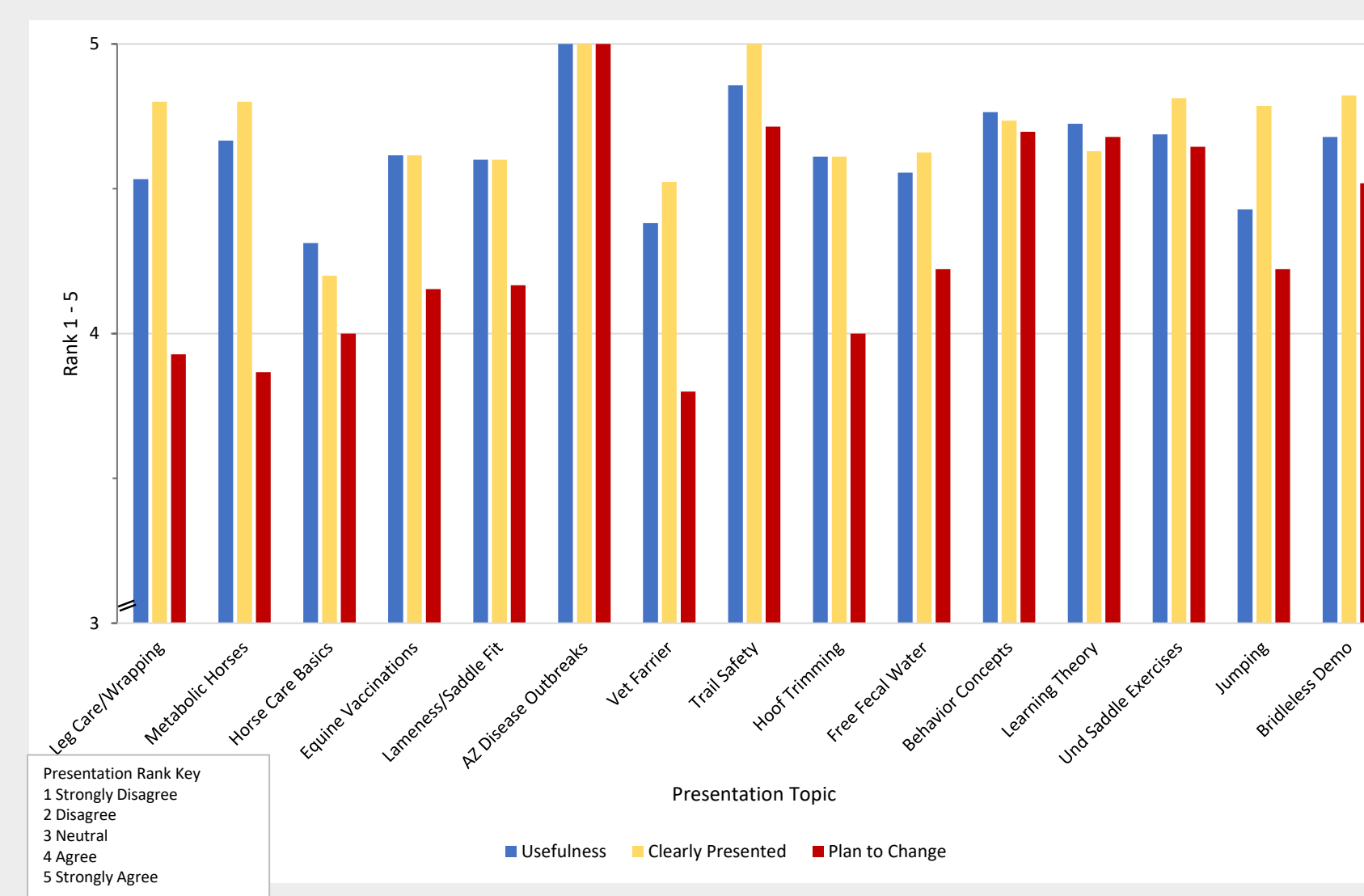


Figure 4: Perception of presentation value by attendees at the 2026 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium.

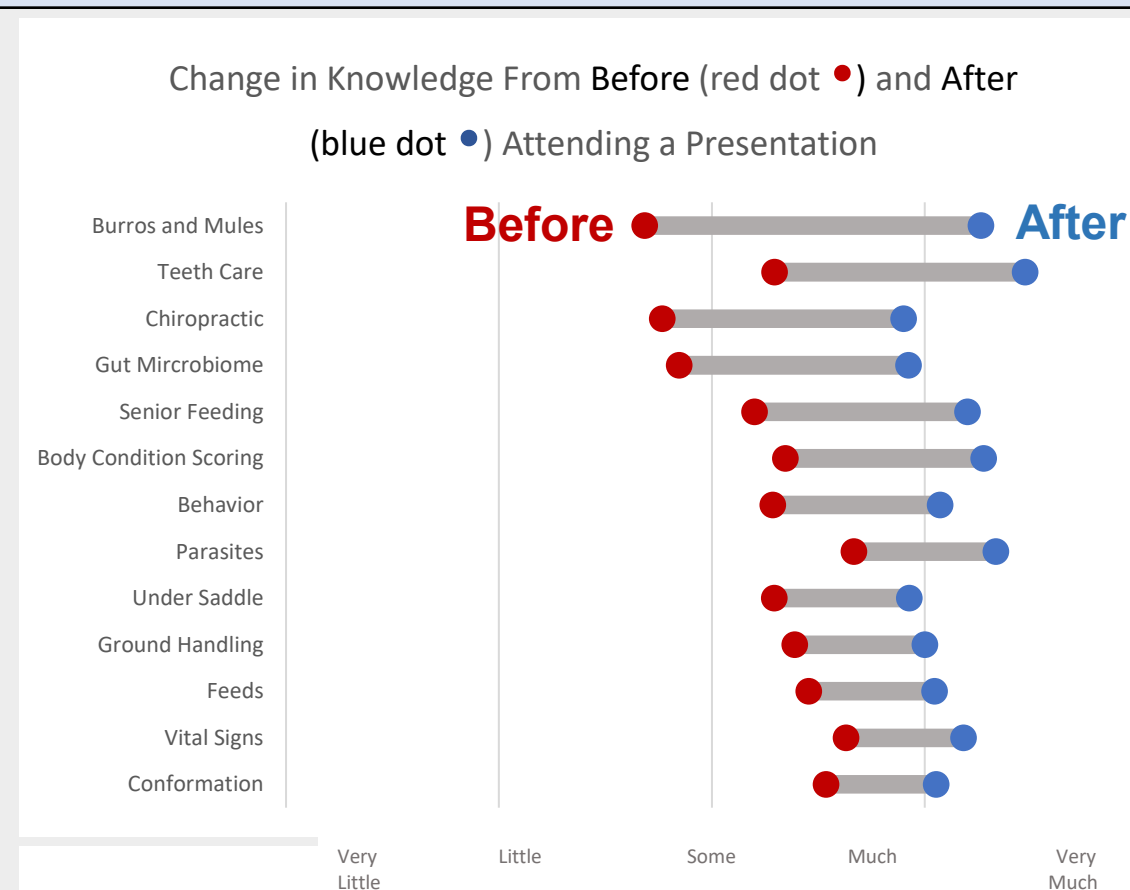
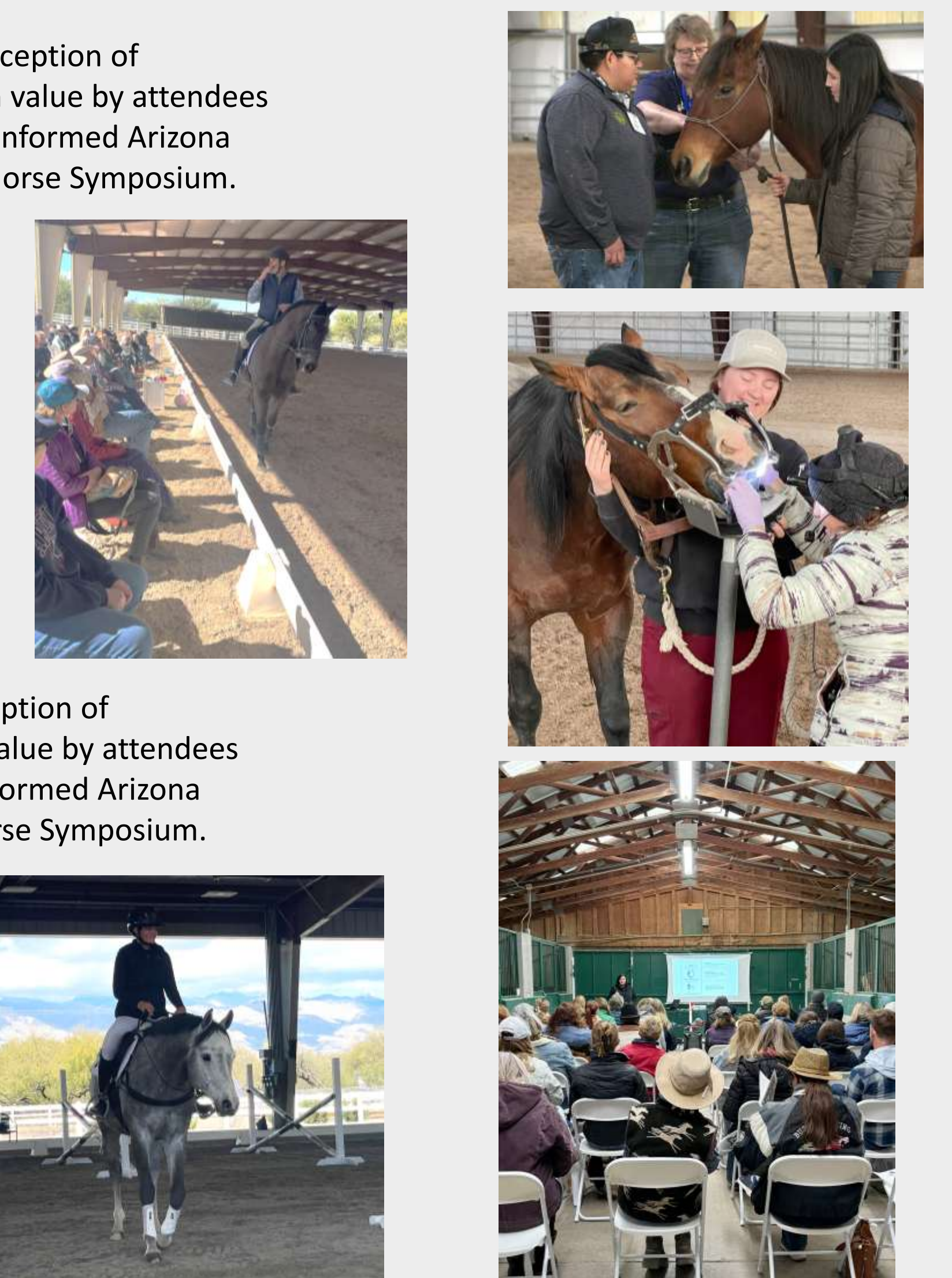


Figure 5: Attendees' perceived topic knowledge before and after presentations at the 2025 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium.

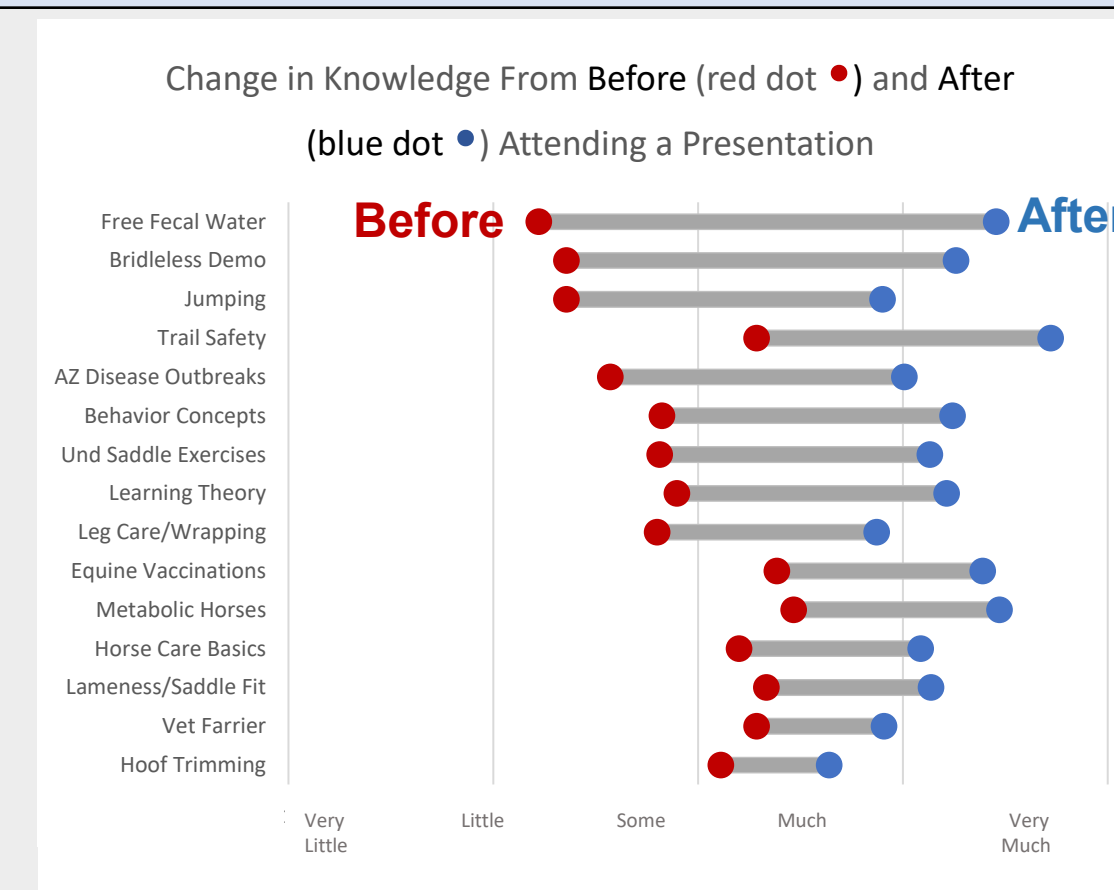


Figure 6: Attendees' perceived topic knowledge before and after presentations at the 2026 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposium.

Attendee knowledge gains

- ✓ All topics were associated with an increase in knowledge as a direct result of the presentations.
- ✓ Larger gains were associated with more technical and/or unfamiliar topics. The amount of gain they increased was reflected by a beginning lower score of *previous knowledge* on topics.
- ✓ Smaller gains were observed for those topics that experienced attendees would have had previous knowledge/skills (e.g., round robin sessions), which also had lower *plan to change* scores, as noted previously.

Conclusion

Overall, the 2025 and 2026 Informed Arizona Equestrian Horse Symposiums showed that even with changes in location, format, and logistics, the event continues to be a valuable and engaging experience for attendees. The move to a two-day format and the addition of a private facility in 2026 created more opportunities for hands-on demonstrations and real-world application, even though it introduced a few challenges with survey collection and perceptions of cost. Attendees consistently found the presentations useful, easy to understand, and relevant to horse care, with many reporting meaningful knowledge gains, especially in newer or more technical topics. Sessions with lower reported intent to change behavior often reflected participants already being familiar with the material or not directly applying it, rather than a lack of value. New approaches, like live-streaming demonstrations for better visibility, were especially popular and added to the overall experience. Moving forward, continuing to build on these interactive elements while refining evaluation methods (such as adding a "not applicable" option) will help ensure the symposium remains accessible, practical, and impactful for a wide range of Arizona horse owners and enthusiasts.