

Agricultural Info Sheet

The Equine Industry in Chester County

Chester County is home to a vibrant, diverse equine community. Our relationship with horses is ingrained in our history and heritage and continues through time-honored traditions, as well as companionship and leisure. The term “equine” includes animals other than horses and ponies, such as mules, burros and donkeys but for the purpose of this info sheet, we are primarily talking about horses and ponies.

Equine activities in Chester County

What kinds of equine activities are there in the county?

People of all ages engage with equine through a wide range of activities. While there are opportunities specific to youth such as pony clubs and 4-H clubs, there is something for everyone, including but not limited to:

- carriage
- competitive driving
- dressage
- eventing
- fox hunting
- harness racing
- historic reenactment
- hunter/jumper
- polo
- rodeo
- sidesaddle showing
- Standardbred racing
- steeplechase
- therapeutic offerings
- Thoroughbred racing
- trail riding
- western

Most riders are involved in several of these pursuits.





I don't ride horses, how can I get involved?

Non-riders can still participate in the industry as spectators at a variety of equine events. There are multiple events in each discipline, but some of the bigger public events include:

These occur at different times throughout the year, so be on the look-out for them.

- Brandywine Hills Point-to-Point
- Brandywine Polo
- Cheshire Hunt Point-to-Point
- The Devon Horse Show
- Dressage at Devon
- Ludwig's Corner Horse Show and Country Fair
- Pennsylvania Hunt Cup
- Plantation Field International Horse Trials
- Willowdale Steeplechase

I see a lot of horses around here, how many are there?

It is not possible to know the exact number of horses in the county because there is no registration or licensing requirement, however based on the 2017 economic impact study commissioned by the Chester Delaware County Farm Bureau we know there are approximately

10,300 horses in Chester County. (Impact of the Equine Industry on the Economy of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Urbanchuk, et. al, Delaware Valley University, 2017)

This is approximately a six percent reported increase in the number of horses in Chester County

from the 2012 Ag Census, which suggests this thriving agricultural sector continues to be a significant economic and cultural component in our area. (Urbanchuk, et. al, 2017)



So this is generally a recreational pursuit, right?

No. Some people have one or two horses for trail riding and other recreational activities, but there are many people in the county that are involved as a profession.

The industry supports nearly 2,700 jobs in all sectors of the economy. Approximately half of these jobs are directly related to horses. (Urbanchuk, et. al, 2017)

Horses require a very wide range of products and services and virtually all are provided by local professionals and service companies. So in addition to breeders, trainers, barn managers, stable hands, grooms, and barn and property maintenance people, the industry employs farmers who grow feed and hay, and a wide range of people including veterinarians, blacksmiths, carpenters, plumbers and more.

In addition, there are people who offer boarding, own feed mills, tack or saddlery shops, have hardware or lumber stores, haul manure, are tractor and truck manufacturers and suppliers, or are insurance providers.

What is the impact on our economy?

Equine industry participants spend nearly \$91.5 million on goods and services in Chester and Delaware Counties, and the industry directly and indirectly accounts for nearly \$117 million of additional economic activity. (Urbanchuk, et. al, 2017)



Is the equine industry really part of the agricultural industry?

Yes. Equine activities are recognized by both the Commonwealth and the federal government (USDA) as normal agricultural operations.



What makes Chester County a good place for the industry to thrive?

Chester County is unique for several reasons. The county is home to a full spectrum of equine activities including international events, world renowned riders including Olympians and World Cup champions, and world-class facilities like University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine's New Bolton Center.

In addition, the equine industry here is part of a larger closed agricultural system. Few places have the diversity of agriculture that we have here. Crop farmers grow wheat and make feed hay to sell locally to those running equine operations. The straw from the wheat harvest is used as bedding for the horses and the hay is used for feed. Horse owners (usually at the commercial level) can then sell the soiled stable bedding to mushroom farmers and composters as an ingredient for making fresh mushroom substrate, the material in which mushrooms are grown.

And there is no direct competition from the mushroom industry for the hay because mushroom farms do not need the same quality hay that horse owners need; they are two different markets. So in essence, many of our farmers win because the equine and mushroom industries provide a dependable market for crops of varying quality, and farmers can buy locally from each other.



Does any of this really impact people who are not involved in the industry?

Yes. Horse owners not only generate significant local revenue and pay taxes, they help maintain our sense of place by keeping land in productive open space and agricultural land. With over 10,000 horses in the county, horse pasture and related lands are common throughout.

The respondents of the economic impact study survey alone reported devoting nearly 4,110 acres to equine activities, (60% to pasture, 20% to crops and 13.7% for forage) and preserving an additional 5,573 acres through agricultural preservation and agricultural and conservation easements. (Urbanchuk, et. al, 2017)