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Published January 10, 2008



(Photo by Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)  
Grooming time: Michigan State University student Brooke Fuchs brings a mare in to be groomed Wednesday at the MSU Horse Research and Teaching Center in East Lansing. Students were cleaning, grooming and taking pictures of mares donated to MSU.

#### By the numbers

155,000

approximate number of horses in Michigan in 2007

133,000

horses in Michigan in 1996

440,000

acres of land devoted to horses in Michigan

\$7.8 billion

value of equine-related assets such as barns, equipment and supplies

60 percent

Michigan horses used for recreational purposes

Source: Michigan Equine Survey

#### Photo Gallery:

[MSU Horse Teaching and Research Center](#)

## Equine aficionados enjoy surge in horse population

Trend brings ideas of building tourism focus around animals

Kathleen Lavey  
Lansing State Journal

The number of horses in Michigan has jumped more than 16 percent over the past 10 years, a new statewide survey shows.

Michigan is home to about 155,000 horses, donkeys, mules, and miniatures, according to the survey conducted by Michigan State University, the Michigan Horse Council and the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

That's up from 133,000 in 1996.

While horse racing has declined since 1996, activities such as trail riding have increased, said Val Vail-Shirey, executive director of the Michigan Equine Partnership, which works on policy issues to benefit the equine industry.

That means it might make sense to develop horse-related tourism in Michigan, Vail-Shirey said.

The Equine Partnership is conducting a feasibility study for building a state-of-the-art horse facility in southern Michigan.

"We do have some regional facilities but this would bring Michigan up," Vail-Shirey said. She said California, Kentucky, New York, Florida and Maryland have worked successfully to increase horse tourism.

About 60 percent of people who keep horses do so for recreation, the survey showed.

Maureen Fettes of Williamston and her family have six horses, and her children show them in 4-H and other competitions. Rebecca, 15; Ashten, 13; Nicole, 11; and Mitchell, 9, are veteran riders.

Maureen Fettes and her late husband, Ron, both had horses before they got married, and were only too happy to get back in on the fun when their kids started riding.

"I think riding has taught my kids patience," she said. "It doesn't just happen. It takes commitment and dedication."

She said she would like her kids to keep on riding, "because that's what their dad would have wanted."

Riding also is a family affair for Peg and Fred Heath, their children and grandchildren. The Heaths have four horses on their Mason-area property, and they shuttle their three grandchildren to 4-H shows and other events all summer.

"I think it's really what holds the family together," Peg Heath said. "We're always going out to shows together."

She admitted keeping horses isn't cheap, but pointed out that speedboats and other hobbies also can be costly.

The cost of keeping horses is a concern for Karen Waite, an equine extension specialist for MSU.

She said the state's economic crunch hasn't helped horse owners. For example, hay costs \$4 to \$5

per bale now, as opposed to \$2 a bale last year.

"It's difficult to sell horses at the moment, and it's difficult to feed horses at the moment," Waite said. She said she hopes that combination does not open the door to neglect of the animals.

From her standpoint as an educator, Waite said, the survey might help shape the programs created to help people who own horses, she said.

Additional data from the survey is being analyzed and should be available in several months, Waite said.

Data include everything from how much manure is produced to zoning issues faced by horse owners and additional analysis of the economic impact of the horse industry in Michigan.

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