

THE UNWANTED HORSE ISSUE:

BECOMING A PART OF THE SOLUTION

by Emily Johnson

Jobless, deprived of a family to call their own, and lacking a permanent home -this desolate reality plagues more than just members of the human population of our nation right now.

There is another group facing dire and desperate times - in fact a life or death kind of desperation in which they are helpless to help themselves without our aid.

Horses. Beautiful. Majestic. Innocent.

The number of unwanted horses has soared in recent years to the extent that “the unwanted horse” has become a well-worn phrase in the equine industry.

The growing significance of the unwanted horse problem has only recently caught my attention despite my being immersed in the equine industry on a daily basis. When I began as a volunteer trainer at the [Colorado Horse Rescue](#) this past year, my eyes were opened to the surprising number of quality horses without a purpose, a human or a home.



Even as (or maybe *especially* as) an active professional in the industry I have to admit that I have had some misconceived notions about the kind of horses that find themselves at a Rescue. I had always considered a rescue as a bit of a one-way street picturing no-good, mangy, and out of work animals. A Rescue was a good place to take a horse, but not such a great place to get one, right?

Wrong! I have been so pleasantly humbled by the caliber of “unwanted” horses that I have met at CHR. While many of them are indeed out of work right now, they are far from being a no-good animal (whatever that means anyway). Having worked with many talented, bright, willing and open-hearted horses at CHR, I’ve come to suspect that there is a wealth of fine equines, currently labeled as unwanted, all across our nation.

What, then, has led them to becoming an unwanted horse?

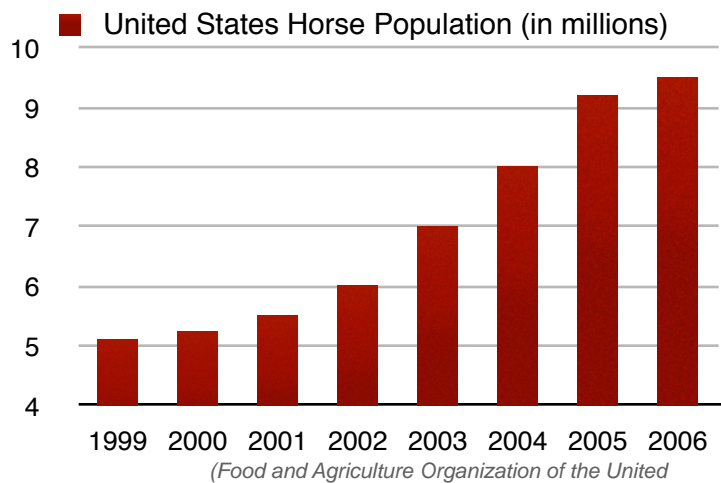
THE PLETHORA OF UNWANTED HORSES

There are many reasons that cause a horse to become unwanted. In some cases, illness or unsoundness renders them unusable for their current purpose. They may have outlived their usefulness in their current occupation (for example, a 4 year-old has already reached the end of their racing career), or their owner may have simply outgrown them. Some may have undesirable behavior, while others have owners who are no longer able to financially support them. Whatever the circumstance, we have a responsibility as horse lovers to consider their well-being as we help them move on to new possibilities.

It does little good to point fingers or render blame with regards to the current conundrum, rather it is vital that we join together toward aiding in the solution. But, in order to do so, it is important to understand the history of this issue in the hopes that lessons are learned to better the future of our beloved equines.



There have been several factors in recent years that have contributed to what is now a nearly insurmountable number of unwanted horses today. The loss of farmland to development, over-breeding, the closure of horse slaughter plants in the US, and the hammered economy have worked synergistically to set the stage for the issue at hand. The United States has a burgeoning population of horses, 9.5 million as of 2008 (FAO United Nations), which is far greater than the resources available to support them.



As a result, these animals are suffering devastating consequences. The number of starvation cases has increased by heart-wrenching numbers. Even good hearted agencies, such as animal rescues are feeling the heat from the financial times and some, sadly, end up neglecting the animals they were trying to save in the first place. (Read more about a [local case of animal neglect](#)).

Horses are being turned loose, left to fend for themselves in impossible environments. Often, these animals become severely injured or killed facing hazards that they were never meant to handle.

Some owners are allowing their horses to slowly starve while others are leaving them for dead along a country dirt road. In extreme cases, some despondent owners are attempting euthanasia - themselves. I recently read of a horse in New Mexico, a soft eyed chestnut mare, that staggered her way two miles back to civilization bleeding from six bullet wounds in her head, an unsuccessful euthanasia attempt by her owner. She is miraculously alive today (appropriately named Miracle), living her life alongside people committed to her welfare, despite the bullets still lodged between her ears.



For those horses not “lucky” enough to suffer stateside, vast numbers continue to be sold at [auction](#) where a majority go to slaughter, now having to face the long and arduous trek to Mexico or Canada.

It is dire and desperate times for our equine companions indeed.

PREVENTION: WHAT CAN WE DO?

What is our responsibility as so called “horses lovers” to the issue at hand?

With resources tight and positions for *long-term equine companions* slim, this is a time where a strong resumé is

worth its weight in gold. A well-trained animal has a better chance of being partnered with a responsible owner than does an untrained or poorly trained horse.



It is of the utmost importance that horse owners provide their horses with an adequate education, one in which the horse learns to be a safe and respectful partner on the ground and under saddle. Doing so, equips the horse to be a responsible and contributing member of society, increasing their chance for a secure and successful future.

Recently, I met a 17 year-old gelding, handsome, kind and willing, who has been standing in a field for the past 13 years of his life. He has a limited education on the ground and is even less experienced under saddle. I felt grave concern for this horse's future, knowing that if the day comes when his owner is no longer able to keep him, his chance of finding a new partner are limited.

I recognize that the majority of horse owners do not have the skills, time or facilities to properly equip and safely train their horse themselves. For those who currently have a horse in need of training I strongly encourage you to pair yourself with a capable trainer. The best circumstance would be to find someone who is also skilled at educating *you*. (There is a list of questions to help you find a suitable trainer/instructor for you and your horse in this [article](#).)



To neglect educating your horse (and yourself!) limits your ultimate partnership together and is an irresponsibility to the future well-being of your horse.

SOLUTION: HELPING THE HORSES ALREADY ABANDONED

What about the horses that have already been passed down the line and find themselves as “unwanted”?

Fortunately, the industry is beginning to respond.

Working at the national level is the [Unwanted Horse Coalition](#) (UHC), an offshoot of the [American Horse](#)

[Council](#). Instituted in 2005, the UHC is an alliance of equine organizations joined together to educate the horse industry about the unwanted horse issue. In addition, there are numerous legislative proposals on the table at any given time, designed to bring greater consideration to the humane treatment and vitality of the American horse.

Major organizations, such as the Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse Associations, are implementing programs to help horses find a new lease on life after retiring from their careers.

And all across the nation, grassroots efforts are being made by therapeutic riding centers, riding academies, veterinary clinics and rescues organizations to help unwanted horses experience the best lives possible.



INVOLVEMENT: WHERE COLORADO HORSE-LOVERS CAN HELP

Locally, I have been inspired by the triumphant work that occurs at the [Colorado Horse Rescue](#), as they nurse downtrodden horses back to health with the intent of finding them a new home. But it has also become apparent that without a foundational set of job skills the chances of these horses finding an adequate home are dramatically lessened.

What began as a passing dialogue with a CHR staff member, has turned into the creation of a training program geared toward increasing the adoptability and long-term viability of these kind-hearted beings.

Considering all the ways these generous animals extend themselves to enhance our lives, we have a responsibility, in return, to help them become their best selves and find partnership with a human of their own.

I encourage you to read on to the following page to learn about the **Wanted Horse Training Program**, a partnership between [Mountain Rose Horsemanship Training](#) and [Colorado Horse Rescue](#) and to see how you can get involved in helping the horses.



I do hope that you will align with me in an effort to help the beloved equines of our country have a fighting chance to live life to the full by educating them to their fullest potential.



**COLORADO HORSE RESCUE AND MOUNTAIN ROSE HORSEMANSHIP TRAINING
ANNOUNCE THE . . .**





~ Wanted Horse Training Program ~ Turning Unwanted Horses Into Wanted Partners



Dear Fellow Horse Lover,

There is an exciting new venture designed to help horses that are currently unwanted find the loving home and quality life they so deserve!

The *Wanted Horse Training Program* has been established at [Colorado Horse Rescue](#), by Emily Johnson, owner of [Mountain Rose Horsemanship Training](#), to help fulfill CHR's mission of rehabilitation and ultimate adoption for the current horses in their care.

The *WHTC* was created from the belief that every horse is worthy of the chance to live a quality life as someone's special equine companion. We have confidence that the horses who adorn the paddocks at CHR can flourish into fabulous equine partners, regardless of the misfortune that rendered them to CHR's doorstep. Through this partnership, we commit to doing our part in helping improve the lives and ensuring a positive future for current unwanted horses.

Horses offered for adoption through the *Wanted Horse Training Program* have been educated in the ways of partnership with people. They have demonstrated themselves to be respectful and willing partners and are equipped with a solid foundation from which one may build their horsemanship dreams.

The program already has a terrific start, but we need *your* help to ensure its ultimate success.

Horse Handler Team:

In order to educate multiple horses at a time we have created a Horse Handler Team. Volunteering as a part of the team is a fabulous opportunity to serve the horses while improving your own horsemanship through complementary weekly instruction in the Horse Handler class taught by Emily Johnson.

To find out more about becoming a part of the Horse Handler Team, please contact Stacey at CHR (scouch@chr.org or 720-494-1414).

Step 1: Complete the Prospective Horse Handler Volunteer Questionnaire.

Step 2: Attend *Horsemanship 101: Earning Respect* course*. (See flyer on next page).

Step 3: Schedule an evaluation session with a member of the CHR staff.

Step 4: Become a part of the solution by helping to educate unwanted horses!

(*Completion of the course does not merit automatic entrance onto the team. All prospective horse handler volunteers will be interviewed and assessed following completion of the course.)

Financial Support:

The *Wanted Horse Training Program* also has some financial needs to ensure its viability, such as purchasing quality training equipment and compensating training professionals for their services. Please consider making a donation to Colorado Horse Rescue, specific to the *Wanted Horse Training Program*.



in partnership with

