

## New equine survey is good horse sense

*Published in the Chronicle-Independent, July 27, 2005*

Sir Winston Churchill once said, "There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man." Considering the number of horses in Kershaw County, there must be something about a horse that is good for the economy, especially in our area.

Kershaw County is fortunate to be home to a wide range of equine activities. In our area you can find steeplechasing, rodeo, the hunt, pleasure riding, and horse shows of every variety, as well as training, boarding, and event facilities. Each facet contributes to the overall economy of Kershaw County by creating jobs, supporting businesses, and greatly adding to our tourism dollars. Furthermore, the horse industry enhances our quality of life by contributing a unique character to our area and by preserving open spaces and natural areas.

Local equine enthusiasts and community leaders have long been aware of the significance of the horse industry in Kershaw County. Responding to a desire to maintain and further develop Kershaw County's competitive edge in equine business development, a survey was commissioned in 1994 by local horsemen and related businesses. This survey, conducted by Hope Cooper, provided key insight into the size and economic impact of the horse industry in Kershaw County. The results of this effort showed remarkable economic impact. However, a lot of changes have occurred during the last decade.

The 2005 Equine Survey is underway. Conducted by the South Carolina USDA Agriculture Statistics Service in cooperation with the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, it will be the first comprehensive statewide survey since 1979.

To continue efforts to be competitive statewide in the equine industry, Kershaw County equine owners need to participate in this new statewide survey. ("Equine" also includes donkeys and mules.) This new survey will provide evidence of the significant impact of the horse industry throughout the state. My hope is that Kershaw County will rank at or near the top of the survey and will show that our area supports a thriving industry. Showing the viability of our equine industry is an opportunity to attract more investment to Kershaw County.

Numbers really add up. According to the SC Department of Agriculture, the annual economic impact of the SC Equine industry is \$330,000,000. This is based on an estimate of 100,000 horses in this state, and that the yearly maintenance cost of a horse is \$3,300. This maintenance cost only includes feed and veterinary and farrier services. Actual costs can go far beyond that when you take into consideration expenses such as fencing, barns and stables, tack, training, trucks and trailers, insurance, and real estate, just to mention a few. The new survey will provide a more complete picture of the horse population and how much, on what, and where money is spent.

Survey results will be shared with the public; the media; and with local, state, and national elected officials. One goal of the census is to raise awareness of the horse industry's impact, thereby gaining recognition and encouragement from the State. The results of the census will also assist with marketing for equine and related industries, SC tourism and investment marketing, as well as natural resource planning, and recreation activities. All of this bodes well for Kershaw County with our long tradition of horses and history and our central geographic location.

If you own a horse, mule, or donkey – one or several – please turn in your equine survey. If you have not received a survey or have lost yours, you can stop by the Kershaw County Farmer's Market this Saturday, July 30 between 8 am and 11 am, to pick one up, or you can call the SC USDA Agriculture Statistics Service toll free 1-800-424-9406 to receive a survey in the mail. Each animal needs to be counted, so let's get those surveys in as soon as possible.