



## **American Horse Council Economic Impact Study Notes Significance of Florida Horse Industry**

*Florida Equine Industry Jobs Surpass 113,000, \$6.8 Billion in impact*

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**Ocala, Fla.**— The latest American Horse Council study pinpoints the Florida equine industry’s large-scale economic impact and industry officials are taking note. The \$6.8 billion annual equine economic impact in Florida is up by 33% since the last study over a decade ago. The racing sector’s impact is up 47%.

“That’s significant,” said Lonny Powell, CEO of the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders’ and Owner’s Association. “Florida truly is a horse state. To many, the beach, sun, sand, and oranges are synonymous with Florida, but our state has been steadily adding equines to that list to hang our state’s collective hat on for some time. Equines are becoming a strong part of Florida’s brand.”

“A thriving thoroughbred industry is vital to the state’s economy and to providing world class entertainment to spectators from around the globe,” said P.J. Campo, Vice President of Racing for The Stronach Group.

Campo added, “It’s significant that racetrack operators in the state generate \$307 million in revenue and create over 1,200 jobs with purses in excess of \$105 million. Our Miami-area operation, Gulfstream Park, is one of the gems in the racing world and its right here in Florida.” Campo is referring to the world-class racing experience for both competitors and spectators and one of the world’s richest days of horse racing with the Pegasus World Cup.

“Florida has a robust equine industry with more than \$6.8 billion total value added to the state’s economy,” said Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam. “As the third largest state in terms of equine population in the United States, Florida’s horse industry is vital to the state’s

economy. The export of purebred horses from the state is one of our fastest growing sectors and shows the prominence of Florida's horses worldwide."

The numbers also reveal jobs are up by 8% from the last study conducted 13 years ago. Florida has been a proponent of state job growth, especially in recent years, and the employment numbers are important for an overall robust state environment. The labor-intensive industry provides jobs ranging from directly working with horses – including grooms, trainers and equine health practitioners - to a significant number of jobs that exist in the restaurant, hotel and hospitality sector thanks to racetracks and equine venues.

Thoroughbred horse sales, specifically the Ocala Breeders' Sales, contribute strongly to the hospitality sector as buyers from as many as 49 states and 38 countries flock to the two-year-olds in training sales each spring. Horse sales in the state generated \$156 million in revenue in 2016. Tom Ventura, president of Ocala Breeders' Sales said, "Since 2010, OBS has sold over 22,000 horses for more than \$1 billion dollars to buyers from every state except Alaska and 38 different countries. OBS has become the destination to buy quality two year olds, accounting for nearly 70% of juvenile sales in North America."

In addition to the sales, Ocala, Marion county, is recognized worldwide as the hub of thoroughbred breeding and training carrying the moniker, "Horse Capital of the World™" due to the number of horses of all breeds and world class equine events that are based there. About 15,000 thoroughbreds annually receive early training in the state away from harsh winters and frozen ground. The area is strongly supported by a concentration of equine services, such as leading veterinarians, researchers, feed and tack retailers, equine dentists, and major horse transportation companies.

"Anecdotally, we've known locally for a long time the significant impact of equines to our county economy. Our 2015 study commissioned by the CEP provided those hard numbers - a substantive \$2.6 billion economic impact to the county. Having a national study that drills down to the state level just solidifies the growth we've been seeing in recent years ourselves," said Kevin T. Sheilley, president and CEO of the Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership.

The latest study reports Florida is home to 387,078 horses with one in four being thoroughbreds in racing, competition and recreation. Thoroughbreds make up the largest segment of the horse population in Florida. Florida nationally is third in horse population behind Texas which is over four times larger geographically and California which over two times larger.

"With over 113,000 jobs and a robust \$6.8 billion in total impact, equines continue to have a notably greater economic impact than our signature spring baseball training. The study clearly supports the train of thought that the Florida thoroughbred business, along with our entire equine industry, are not only worth preserving but supporting and growing as well. Florida is most

fortunate to have such an industry and agri-business already well established within its borders just as we Floridians are fortunate to live and work here,” Powell said.

With the fourth largest growth rate in the nation, land is at a premium in Florida. Agricultural operations like equine production preserve a significant amount of land. The latest report notes land owned or rented for horse-related purposes has increased to 717,000 acres. The preserved land, mostly in Central Florida, provides rural opportunities for city-bound Floridians and opportunities for diversity of tourism in the state. The report covers figures as of 2016.

Last year, two Florida-breds, Caledonia Road and World Approval won Eclipse awards, the nation’s highest honor for thoroughbreds. They join the list of 52 national champions including six Florida-bred Kentucky Derby winners. Florida has had more winners of Kentucky Derbies outside of Kentucky than any other state. Champions include 28 Breeders’ Cup winners.

“It’s clear to see why the road to the Kentucky Derby begins here in Ocala, Horse Capital of the World™,” said City of Ocala Mayor Kent Guinn, “ It is a major epi-center of the horse world and is part of our daily life here integrated into our hometown history, arts and culture. It’s not surprising the state numbers would reflect what we’ve known in Marion County for a long time, that the industry makes a significant impact.”

“The equine industry is a key driver of the local economy in Marion County,” said Kathy Bryant, Chairman of the Marion County Commission. “Ever since Needles’ triumph in the 1956 Kentucky Derby, we’ve proudly been the home to countless thoroughbreds who attract jobs and excitement to our community.”

Incentive programs offered in the state are a key to the industry and have grown in recent years.

“Florida consistently ranks in the top two to three in foal crop annually. Incentives in the state from breeders’ and owners’ awards, to bonus money for races of all types give Florida-breds robust opportunities to earn more for their owners who have invested in them. The Florida Sire Stakes series promotes stallions standing in the state and gives FSS eligible Florida-breds going into the sales arena opportunities for their buyers to race in the prestigious series,” said Powell. Stephen W. Screnci, president of Florida Horsemen’s Benevolent and Protective Association, Inc., “It is very rewarding to see strong Florida numbers and with new incentive additions to racing meets, the economic impact should continue to further enhance our already strong all-year program here in Florida.”

“We are continually seeking to enhance the state’s breeding and racing programs by providing incentives for horsemen to race Florida-breds at Tampa Bay Downs,” said the track’s Vice President and General Manager Peter Berube. “We also recognize the importance of Florida’s thoroughbreds and to attracting new investors in the state.”

Bob Jeffries, president of the Tampa Bay Downs HBPA, offered his enthusiasm for the study noting the cooperation of industry members to continue the growth of the industry.

“We have the largest stakes program in Tampa Bay Downs history currently. When the track, the horsemen and the Florida breeders work together as a team, good things happen for everyone. And good things are happening,” Jeffries said.

Powell added, “Our job at FTBOA is to promote, advocate for and enhance the economics of our state-wide industry at home as well as outside our state and national borders. This fresh American Horse Council study clearly demonstrates the importance of our mandate on behalf of the entire state industry. Our breeders, farms, tracks, owners, conditioners and equine professionals are top-shelf, which, along with our weather and quality of life, make Florida the greatest place to breed, sell, own and race.”

The industry is supported by Florida’s Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services which creates a favorable business climate including no tax on stallion seasons, exemptions for horses purchased from original breeders and a breeding stock exemption. Feed and animal health items are exempt along with certain farm equipment. Property tax breaks are also provided to Florida’s horse farms.

New to the study was the addition of analysis of the impact and scale of equine retirement, sanctuaries, and therapy programs. These programs among other re-training programs give thoroughbreds that are no longer racehorses opportunities for second careers in horse sport competitions and recreation. These programs added multi-millions in impact, slightly over \$114 million, compared to the billions in the racing sector, but their importance cannot be unscored enough in showcasing the versatility of horses in second careers.

### ***About the FTBOA***

*The Florida Thoroughbred Breeders' and Owners' Association is a not-for-profit association with the mission of promoting the Florida thoroughbred. The FTBOA represents more than 1,300 thoroughbred breeders and owners internationally who breed, raise, sell, train and race horses born in the state of Florida. The FTBOA is located at 801 SW 60th Avenue in Ocala, Fla., the heart of one of the top breeding and general horsemanship regions worldwide.*