



## Equine Welfare is Everyone's Responsibility

The plight of the unwanted or neglected horse is a continuing welfare issue in this country. Seldom does a week go by without a publicized horse welfare issue in some form of neglect, abuse, or abandonment on social media. With an aim to provide a greater foundation of knowledge regarding the welfare of the horse, Equine Guelph launched an awareness campaign, 'Full-Circle-Responsibility.' The message is as important today with the increased pressures on affordable horse care and facilities as Equine Guelph celebrates its 20th Anniversary.



Through this educational initiative, Equine Guelph continues its goal of assisting horse owners to develop the necessary tools and skills to make sound management decisions based on scientific research in order to support the well-being of the horse. Prevention is critical. Recognition and rapid response through a knowledgeable approach is also necessary.

With the current economic climate, many in the horse industry have been forced to look for ways to live more frugally. Unfortunately, the horse's welfare may be compromised.

"The majority of horse owners and riders have a strong attachment to their horses, and would not purposely go out of their way to neglect a horse," says Gayle Ecker, Director of Equine Guelph. "But proper equine welfare goes far beyond providing the basics of food and water. It's about how the horse is managing with the conditions in which it lives. It's about taking full responsibility for horse ownership right up until the end."

### What is Equine Welfare?

The simple definition of welfare, "quality of life", can at times be unclear, as this term can mean different things to different people. This is especially true of equine welfare, where breeds vary greatly in their needs. Nonetheless, everyone can agree that providing good welfare to our beloved horses should be based on both physical and mental health.

In the past, society normally regarded equine welfare only as it relates to the animal's physiology and its environment, such as feeding and shelter. But over the past 20 years, the science of animal welfare has made huge developments in recognizing their needs by expanding the concept of welfare and management issues of the horse to include also their well-being, that is to provide "a life worth living" and reducing pain, suffering or neglect.

## What is best for the horse?

Equine Guelph helps provides several opportunities for horse owners to update/upgrade their knowledge and ability for following the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines, an important tool for ensuring good care.

“The code was developed for both the professional and the individual owner for the health and welfare of horses,” says Jack de Wit, past Director of the Equine Canada Board of Directors and Chair of the Code Development Committee.

The Code was established to develop and enforce guidelines for minimum standards for the welfare of the horse. This would include proper nutrition, appropriate shelter, disease prevention and treatment, humane handling, and when necessary, humane euthanasia. Its development was led by an 18-person committee made up of equine owners, caregivers, animal welfare and enforcement representatives, researchers, veterinarians and government representatives. A five-person Scientific Committee, which included researchers with expertise in equine behaviour, health and welfare, also aided in its concept.

Digital copies of The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines, a 92-page document outlining proper animal care requirements and recommended practices for equine welfare, are available by viewing or downloading at: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/equine>.

## Help Prevent Welfare Issues

Equine welfare is a human responsibility and should extend beyond our farm gates, says Ecker. “While your horses are being properly cared for, what about the neighbour down the street who has fallen on hard times and is unable to afford sufficient hay to feed his horses?” she asks. “Do we turn a blind eye and hope they’ll be alright until the spring? That the problem will fix itself? All of us have a responsibility to take the necessary steps to prevent a horse from suffering. As they can’t speak, we must speak for them.”

Concern for equine welfare is high. To own and care for a horse should be a privilege, not a pastime. Equine welfare education is one important key to helping overcome limited mindsets, creating a system of accountability, and ultimately preventing inhumane practices.



[Sign up at EquineGuelph.ca](http://EquineGuelph.ca) for a free E-newsletter which will deliver monthly practical health and welfare information and announcements on new tools - including Body Condition Scoring, the Horse Health Check, and others - to aid all horse owners in carrying out their 'Full-Circle-Responsibility' to our beloved horses. Visit Equine Guelph on [TheHorsePortal.ca](http://TheHorsePortal.ca) for more opportunities to increase your knowledge on horse health, welfare and safety for new horse owner tools and courses.

**Learn more about the Code of Practice and equine welfare by taking our short course,**

**[Horse Care & Welfare!](#)**