

Time to Get Busy

Legislative time is upon us. It's time for you to talk to your local legislators. There are several things happening that can impact our equine community. I'll outline a few of them:

- **Equine Inherent Risk:** New legislation has been introduced, again, to help reduce the risks stables, farms and all equine establishments face when the general public interacts with your business. Assembly Bill A559 (sponsored by Assemblywoman Woerner and 14 cosponsors) paired with Senate Bill S1152 (sponsored by Senator Ort and 3 cosponsors), called the "Safety in Agricultural Tourism" bill, is "AN ACT to amend the general obligations law in relation to the inherent risks of operating agricultural tourism areas and participating in activities in agricultural tourism areas."

This Bill doesn't remove the responsibility of the horse owner, farm owner, stable owner or anyone from making every effort possible to keep their clients and visitors safe. It simply adds a degree of responsibility upon that client or visitor to understand that there is a degree of danger when anyone steps on a farm, visits a stable, pets an animal or is simply near one.

Our hope is to get this legislation passed because it may lead to reduced insurance for businesses and fewer frivolous law suits. It faces strong opposition, still, from the NYS Trial Lawyers Association which has a strangle hold on the Assembly in our State. As you know, a large proportion of our Assembly members are lawyers. In their letter of opposition, they portray farms and businesses as an accident waiting to happen with dangerous situations lingering all over the place. (See a copy of that letter later in this newsletter.)

If you believe inherent risk protection is important for our industry, you need to call your legislators now, and again, and again, to let them know that they need to push these Bills and tell them the Trial Lawyers have a hugely distorted view of our farms, our stables and businesses. You can also send an E-Lobby letter through the NY Farm Bureau web site: Go to WWW.NYFB.ORG and click on E-LOBBY to send a letter directly to your legislators. You don't have to belong to Farm Bureau to do this; however, being a Farm Bureau member shows your support for agriculture and helps them get important legislation passed as well as defeating bad legislation. NY Farm Bureau is a critical ally for the agricultural community.

- **DEC Trail Supporter Patch:** DEC announced a new Trail Supporter Patch for NY trail users. The Trail Supporter Patch is available for \$5.00 at all sporting license outlets or [on-line at the DECALS](http://DECALS) website for current New York State sporting license holders and will officially be available for purchase on March 1. Patch sale proceeds help maintain and enhance non-motorized recreation trails throughout the state. All

monies raised from patch purchases will be deposited in the Conservation Fund's Outdoor Recreation, Trail Maintenance, and Development Account.



The NYSDEC Trail Supporter Patch is a definite must have for all trail riders. Money from their sales go directly toward maintenance and development of all New York's non-motorized trails, including our designated horse trails. Last year, the Otter Creek Horse Trail System received money for erosion control measures and Brookfield Trail System received monies for accessible mounting platforms at the Assembly Area. There is never enough money to do all the work we would like on our horse trails, but this program is a nice step in helping us get more done. The NYS Horse Council encourages all its members, and even non-members, to purchase a patch to help improve our trails.

- **NYS Fairgrounds Improvements:** Governor Cuomo expressed support and plans to include funding in this year's budget to continue improving the NYS Fairgrounds. Although not specifically designated for improving the barns and arenas, Governor Cuomo included \$3.5 million in the Dept. of Agriculture and Markets budget to address critical capital funding needs and \$70 million for capital funding of Phase II of State Fair modernization efforts. Some information has been collected to determine minimum facility needs to host major horse shows and events at the fairgrounds. Your support is still needed to make sure we don't get left out and all the money is used for other things. Contact Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Richard Ball of NYS Dept. of Agriculture and Markets and NYS Fair Director Troy Wafner to express your support for making our NYS Fairgrounds a premier equine venue. You can also E-LOBBY on this issue through the NY Farm Bureau E-LOBBY feature at www.nyfg.org.
- **NY Rail Trail:** The latest plan is to connect the Greater Hudson Valley with the Champlain Valley by a series of rail trails and walkways from NY City to Canada. Equine use has not been mentioned yet but we are working on it and we ask for your help. Contact the Rail Trail directly at www.nyrailtrail.com/contact.htm to let them know you want at least some of the trail equine accessible. You can also contact your local legislator to tell them your desires, too.

Take advantage of a NYSHC event this year

I hope you can take advantage of some of our new events or join us for some of our traditional offerings. Our biggest new thing is a 2-day clinic featuring well know clinician Gary Lane is designed to help you and your horse find a comfortable working relationship. A limit of 10 riders will participate but virtually an unlimited number of auditors are welcome. This event will be on July 15-16 at Morrisville State College. Check the NYSHC [web site](#) and your email regularly for more information.

A second clinic on August 5-6 and features Tina Wolcott and “The Making of a Trail Horse.” It will be held at Wolcott Farms in Warsaw, NY and it is limited to 15 riders but auditors are also welcome. Further information is also available at www.nyshc.org.

If these don't appeal to you, join us then for our annual **Fall Fun Ride** at the Brookfield Horse Trail System and the Madison County Fairgrounds on October 6-9. We are also sponsoring the **NY 50/30/15 Competitive Trail Ride** on June 24-25 or learn about competitive trail rides at a **CTR Clinic** on May 6 hosted at Pure Country Campground. Both feature riding at the Brookfield Trail system. You can also check out the many events held by our chapters which include a **Cowboy Challenge**, a **Fun Ride at Stewart State Park**, a **Fun Ride at Otter Creek** Horse Trails System in September and local rides hosted by the Catt/Chau Chapter. And of course join our Western Chapter at their fantastic **Equifest**, March 18-19 in Hamburg, NY. They have several well know clinicians on tap and over 100 vendors signed up for your shopping needs.

Membership Counts

I want to thank you, again, for being a member of the NYS Horse Council. We have only a limited way to make money so the more members we have the more money we have to support our membership and our industry. I encourage you to ask a friend to join. We offer a \$1 million liability insurance policy to protect you in case of an accident as well as many other discounts which can be found on our home page. In addition to that, we continue to be a strong voice for the pleasure horse in New York State. The more members we have, the stronger that voice is and the louder we are heard to help our equine friends. We need your help increasing our numbers.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to call or email me.

Stephen Ropel

President

Stephen.Ropel@nyshc.org

518-366-8998