

# Responsible Breeding



*As the unwanted horse problem continues, responsible breeding is a must.*



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THE UNWANTED HORSE CONTINUES TO BE A major issue in the U.S. horse industry. The economic downturn has only served to make the situation worse as many people can no longer afford to keep their horses or find qualified buyers.

AQHA and other organizations, like the Unwanted Horse Coalition, working to solve the problem have focused on finding homes, alternative careers and additional options for horses that are no longer wanted. But if we're going to solve the problem, we must also decrease the number of unmarketable horses we are producing.

There will always be some unwanted horses because horses will grow old, sustain career-ending injuries or not meet their owners' expectations, but we can minimize their numbers through responsible breeding.

In my opinion, the days of "let's breed ol' Dobbin to see what we get" are over because it is unfair to the resulting unmarketable foal, as well as our industry. You need only visit one of the lower-end horse sales or the local sale barn to see the impact of producing poor-quality horses that are selling for only a few hundred dollars or less.

## Making Good Decisions

Unwanted horses, genetic diseases, a declining sales environment, poor production outcomes and horses that do not meet your expectations are often the result of poor breeding decisions. To minimize risk and maximize the likelihood that you will produce exactly what you want, it is always a good idea to rationally think through: 1) which mares you want to breed and why; 2) what stallions you want to book them to and why; and 3) what you want to do with the foal? So here is a brief checklist to aid

you in that process.

- Is the mare from a good bloodline, and has she excelled in the show ring, on the track, at ranch work or on the trail? If she cannot do the job (too slow, too stubborn, unattractive, etc.) don't pass those genes on. Remember, the mare will provide the foal with half of its genetics and often the majority of its personality.

- Has she been tested to ensure she is not carrying the genes for HERDA, HYPP, PSSM, MH or GBED? Genetic tests are available for all of them.

- Has she produced great foals in the past, or have her siblings or half siblings produced great foals?

- Does the stallion have a phenotype similar to the mare's? Too often people select stallions based on word of mouth or an advertisement and few advertisements feature pedigree information. It is always a good idea to research the stallion's blood lines as well as his performance record to determine whether it "nicks" with the mare's.

- Has the stallion been tested to determine whether he is carrying genes for the above genetic conditions? If he is carrying any of them and is bred to your mare, what is the probability that the foal will be affected?

- If you're interested in color, what will be the probable color resulting from this mating?

- Do you have the resources or time to raise and train the foal(s) properly?

- What marketing plan do you have in place to market the foal(s)? Have you nominated them to a futurity to enhance their value?

- What will you do with the offspring if it does not meet your expectations? Will you retrain it for another job, donate it, euthanize it or drop it off at the local sale barn?

- Would you be better off buying a horse rather than breeding your mare?

These are just a few of the many factors you should consider before breeding your mare or standing a young stallion at stud.

I know we all want to produce better horses and protect the integrity of our breed. The best way to do that is to be informed, organized and sensitive to the potential repercussions of breeding anything other than the very best to the very best. 🐾



For more information on keeping your horse healthy, consult an American Association of Equine Practitioners-member veterinarian in your area. For a list of members, log onto [www.aaep.org](http://www.aaep.org).