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For immediate release

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**6th Equine Industry Summit to Focus on the**

 **Role of Horses in Vermont Agriculture & Tourism**

Woodstock, VT—Equine business owners, organizations, and horse owners gather on April 27, 2024, at the Green Mountain Horse Association in Woodstock, VT to discuss the future of Vermont’s equine industry. The 6th Equine Industry Summit, sponsored by the Vermont Horse Council (VHC), focuses in large part on how the horse industry fits into the definition of Vermont agriculture and its growing impact on the economy and tourism in the Green Mountain state.

According to the latest Equine Economic Impact Study done by the UVM Center for Rural Studies and commissioned by VHC in 2018, the horse industry generated $37 million annually from out-of-state visitors and $46 million in total annual instate expenditures, created 652 jobs within the industry, and has kept 518, 500 acres of land open, based on 61 acres per each of the 8500 equines in the state at that time.

To address “How Equine Businesses Fit into the Definition of Agriculture in Vermont”,

Nicole Killoran, director of the Vermont Small Business Law Center at the Vermont Law School, explores this topic with a panel of her students.

Professor Killoran states, “Equine businesses are by nature agricultural, but unlike other agricultural businesses they may not have access to state tax relief. This odd fact, as well as inconsistent laws at the state and local levels, make for a confusing regulatory environment for equine business owners.”

The topic of “Equine Tourism” is being addressed by a panel of industry leaders led by Heather Pelham, Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing, along with Kelly Grant of The Bunkhouse in Washington, Colleen O’Rourke of Pond Hill Ranch and Rodeo in Castleton, and Margot Smithson of the UVM Morgan Horse Farm. The session, one of five, focuses on how to build equine agritourism opportunities in the state.

According to the keynote speaker, Olympic Gold Medalist Denny Emerson of Tamarack Hill Farm in South Strafford, “Horse ownership often translates to land ownership, which creates a large economic ripple effect that benefits many local businesses. Unfortunately, state government appears to be somewhat oblivious to the extent horses in Vermont have contributed to the state’s overall economy.”

The ripple effect of horse ownership on the economy of Vermont is extensive, involving sales of equipment, saddlery, feed, bedding, fencing, barn construction, vehicles, trailers, fuel, veterinarian and farrier services, and property taxes. Additional revenue is generated through boarding, training, and breeding farms, as well as trail riding, lesson, and equine event facilities. Equine events attract out-of-town visitors to horse shows, three-day events, rodeos, and festivals offering horse drawn wagon and sleigh rides, all helping to fuel the tourism industry.

Emerson goes on to say, “The summit brings businesses and organizations together to address the need for a unified voice to communicate the importance and impact of the equine industry both within the industry, and externally with state agencies, legislators, and the public.”

Two other sessions, one on “Partnership and Advocacy” led by Jackie Folsom, president of the Vermont Farm Bureau (VFB), explains why partnership and participation by equine business owners is critical to the VFB’s advocacy process. In another on “Tools for Community Trail Access,” planning and permitting consultant Clark Hinsdale talks about navigating municipal and state systems to obtain equine access to community lands.

The summit concludes with an “Industry Roundtable Discussion” to identify priorities and consider how an industry-wide system can improve communication within the equine industry.

According to VHC President Jeannette Cole, “Through the Vermont Horse Council Equine Industry Summit, we are truly embracing our mission of ‘promoting a thriving equine community in Vermont.’  We are pleased to bring experts from agriculture, tourism, and trails together to help educate our members at this important networking event. Special thanks go to our lead sponsor Farm Credit Northeast AgEnhancement, and to our Gold Sponsors: Green Mountain Horse Association, Blue Seal, Custom Equine Nutrition, Guy’s Farm and Yard, Sentinel Feeds, the Vermont Morgan Horse Association”.

As Clark Hinsdale likes to say, “The world is run by those who show up!” For more information and to register for the summit on April 27, visit  <https://vthorsecouncil.org/summit/> .

The Equine Industry Summit also helps to attract new VHC members, raise sponsorship support to run the event and raise operating capital for the organization. The Vermont Horse Council is an all-volunteer, non-profit educational 501-c3, funded through memberships, fundraising events, donations, and grants.