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Horses: Companions for Life
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In 2005, the horse population in the United States was estimated at 9.5 million horses, the majority of which are used for recreational purposes. This represents a 50% increase in the total horse population in just ten years. This growth in the U.S. equine population represents both opportunity and challenge: it speaks to the growing popularity of horses among recreational riders but also raises questions about the quantity and quality of the horses being bred.

Very few horses spend their entire lives with one owner. Every time a horse changes hands, his fate is closely tied to the level of knowledge, skill and commitment his new owner has to providing him with the best possible life. Too often, a horse with a behavior issue that can be easily mitigated with the right training is instead sold or traded, changing hands many times over the course of its life. Rampant over breeding has allowed a cavalier attitude to prevail in the horse industry, which promotes trading over training with the horse sometimes suffering dire consequences as a result.

The majority of horses in the United States are companion animals, who are used primarily for as pleasure and recreational animals. They excel in a variety of venues: in the show ring, on the trail, as therapy for disabled children, as partners with law enforcement officers and in the highest level of sport. Yet, at any stage of its life, a horse can fall victim to decision making and cruel treatment that its owner would never think of inflicting on other companion animals like dogs and cats. This dichotomy, coupled with a horse industry that actively promotes and rewards over breeding, has fostered an attitude that horses should be traded not trained. This has resulted in many horses being treated as disposable commodities to be dumped at the local auction for reasons that could easily be rectified if his owner had the proper knowledge and skills.

In order for a horse and human to have a successful relationship, they must be well matched in personality, ability, interest, age and temperament. Any time one of these factors is not considered, there is the possibility of failure, frustration, and ultimately, of the horse ending up being traded or sold. In an effort to help new, current and potential horse owners have successful, long-term relationships with their horses, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has launched its Horses: Companions for Life Program. This program will help horse owners have access to the knowledge and information necessary to make good decisions for their horses at all stages of their life.

The keystone of this program is our recently released book, "The HSUS Complete Guide to Horse Care". With this program we hope to educate and inspire horse owners to make responsible and realistic decisions before and while a horse is in their lives so that horse ownership is a positive and life-long experience for both the horse and her guardian.

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