



HORSEMEN WORRIED: Acton Standardbred horse breeders Dave and Irene Workman, shown with some of their horses on their rural farm, are worried what the province's plans to end the slots-at-racetracks program will mean to the harness racing industry. — Frances Learment photo

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Nightmares for local horsemen continue

Losing the family farm, crippling unemployment and the worst-case scenario of putting down their horses rather than have them go to an abattoir – those are the recurring nightmares of many people involved in horse racing and breeding following the Liberal government's decision to end the slots-at-racetrack program.

With at least seven horse racing centres located within five kilometres of Acton, 25 per cent of the population is in some way connected to the industry – owners, trainers, bettors, ferriers or feed lot owners – and money the tracks receive from the slots is invested in the community in the form of jobs, some 60,000 in Ontario.

Following March's announcement from Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG) that the slot machines would be moved away from racetracks to urban centres, the province agreed to spend up to \$50-million over the next three years to help ease the horse-racing industry into a future without slots. A panel of three former Ontario cabinet ministers will also work racing industry officials to determine its future and report by the end of summer.

The current deal, made in 1998, opened slots at tracks with the province receiving 75 per cent of the profits — approximately \$9-billion over the past ten years — with 20 per cent to the 17 participating tracks, and

remaining five per cent to the host municipality. That deal ends next spring as the province “modernizes” and stops “subsidizing” the horse-racing industry by almost \$350-million a year.

Acton Standardbred horse farm breeders Dave and Irene Workman are heartsick that they may not be able to afford to care for their horses once the slots-at-racetracks programs ends. “I have horses in the field here that I tried to give away the other day, but they won't be racing until next year, and I was told that there may not be any racing next year,” Dave Workman said recently.

“I will be forced to euthanize them if there is no harness racing industry,” Workman said, stressing that putting his horses down would be a last-ditch, worst-case scenario, but an option that is being discussed more and more across Ontario. He said he'd been told breeders were putting pregnant mares down before they foaled to avoid stud fees.

Acton's Geoff Maltby, a breeder/trainer/driver who owns a 25 horse stable on Third Line North, said using the government's own figures, ending the slots-at-racetracks program does not make financial sense, and appealing to the public may be the industry's only hope.

Maltby said horses could be destroyed, but the actual worst-case scenario is all of the people

who will be left financially destitute. “I'm one of them. If this totally goes through the way they are saying, I will lose my farm, which has been in his family since the 1890s. I've been the main earner for the past 25 years through this industry – I have no idea what's going to happen, but I don't have a lot of faith in the panel and the \$50-million to be used to retrain people who will lose their breeding and racing related jobs,” Maltby said.

Wellington Warden Chris White, who recently hosted a strategy session to save the slots-at-racetracks program, said a video featuring people affected by the decision will be released this week. “In this video, the people who spoke at the meeting, and others, told their stories in five minute interviews and we (Wellington's Economic Development officials) will distribute it to government officials to try and ramp up a public relations campaign for the industry,” White said.

“This was such a blind-sided hit – I heard of one guy in Erin who usually buys 10 horse trailers a year, and now he has 10 of them sitting on his lot that he can't sell or take back,” White said, adding the fallout from ending the slots-at-racetracks program will be felt much further than a lot of people realize.

Halton wins solid waste silver award

The Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) recognized Halton Region with a Silver Award of Excellence in Landfill Management for the success of the Halton Waste Management Site (HWMS), a state of the art facility with a progressive design and operational practices that have been implemented to minimize and eliminate environmental impacts.

SWANA's Excellence Awards Program recog-

nizes outstanding solid waste programs and facilities that advance the practice of environmentally and economically sound solid waste management using effective technologies and processes in system design and operations, advance worker and community health and safety, and implement successful public education and outreach programs.

“For 20 years, the Halton Waste Management

Site and Regional Waste Management staff have provided excellent service to over 200,000 customers who visit the Site every year,” said Gary Carr, Halton's Chair, adding the Site was designed to manage Halton's waste locally, minimize environmental impacts and offer numerous waste diversion programs on-site to help reach Halton's goal of diverting 65 per cent of residential waste by 2016.