

Breeder says those in horse racing having a tough time planning ahead

Information has been made public by the government about racing opportunities, purse pools, details of the government's transition funding and a long-term plan toward sustainability.

"We need to stop the bleeding right now," said DeMarchi-Meyers, referring to the state of the breeding industry, which has seen a sharp decline of mares being bred to Ontario stallions from 4,071 in 2011 to 2,881 last year.

She said although deals have been made with a number of racetracks over the next three years, she believes there's little information beyond that on how the industry will transition to a viable long-term model.

She also argued horse people are having trouble planning ahead because the breeding aspect of horse racing needs a five-year lead-time.

As a result, she said mares were being bred to stallions in other racing jurisdictions and being shipped out of the province. Breeding bookings have dropped in significant numbers and revenue has been lost at breeding farms and other services like boarding, veterinarian care, and blacksmith.

Canadian Yearling Sales also took a hit with the average yearling being sold for \$8,329 last fall — representing a 43 per cent decrease from 2011 values.

"I'm trying to be optimistic, but it's difficult," she said, adding that she's now seeing stallions being relocated out of the province. Two of the top 10 stallions relocated to the U.S. last year.

She said the government needs to act fast with transitional funding that's needed now to provide the necessary stability and encouragement for investment to move forward.

Noonan said there's speculation that 55,000 jobs will be lost, with many of the people not equipped or trained to do anything else.



John Snobelen was at Mohawk to speak about the future of the horse racing industry. File photo by Graham Paine / Canadian Champion (Follow on Twitter @halton_photog)

"The human cost is huge," he said, adding these hard-working people don't know what to do.

Noonan added equine veterinarians are reporting that in some instances, their business has been cut in half.

Farmers who supply horseman with the grain and hay they need for their horses, he said, are also being affected.

At Mohawk Racetrack in Milton and Woodbine Racetrack in Toronto, both owned by WEG, more than 100 jobs have been eliminated. Mohawk's backstretch was also closed last December and there are no plans to reopen it.

Holmes said while race dates have been reduced, prize purses are relatively the same for this year in terms of standardbred racing. As for the thoroughbred side, the purses will be kept relatively the same, but with fewer dates.

Jamie Martin, WEG's executive vice-president of racing, further explained to the *Champion* during a recent phone interview that this year's standardbred racing schedule will include 84 dates at Mohawk and 99 standard-

bred days at Woodbine. Woodbine will also host 133 thoroughbred racing days.

Last year, there were 124 standardbred racing days at Woodbine and 81 at Mohawk, and 156 thoroughbred race dates at Woodbine. Martin estimated that purses will be about 25 per cent less, which he believes will be the real impact for those whose livelihood is racing.

Holmes said that although some confidence has been brought back to the horse racing industry with racing at the tracks continuing over the next two years, the long-term plan is still unclear. She said WEG hopes to have a casino at both Woodbine and Mohawk racetracks in the future. The revenue from the casinos, she said, would flow back into WEG's core business of horse racing.

During question-and-answer discussions, Snobelen told the crowd in the coming weeks there will be some answers on how exactly horse racing will be "reinvigorated" by integrating it with the Province's overall gaming strategy.

While he's not at liberty to reveal those details, he said the government is feeling the pressure to get the news out there quickly. "The industry has to get smaller to get bigger," he said.

He acknowledged that race days would get cut and purses will likely shrink, but the resources will be poured into places where there is the "biggest bang for your buck."

Racing will be more centralized, he added. Acton resident Shanna Maltby asked how her family is going to survive when they depend on the money they receive from racing their horses. With three kids and an extended family living on her farm, she's worried she'll have to sell everything and go on welfare.

"I can't race one horse once a month and support eight people," she said, adding that they've had the family farm for more than 100 years and would hate to leave it.

Other residents expressed the same concerns and questioned why the provincial government wasn't there to answer their questions.

Earlier in the day, Wynne's office called organizers personally to say she wouldn't be able to make it, but asked that information collected from the meeting be shared with her. The Ontario government continues to negotiate agreements with interested racetracks to provide transition funding for the next three years.

Julia Le can be reached at jle@miltoncanadianchampion.com or on Twitter @JuliaMilton-News.

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