



NEWS RELEASE

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Maryland's Recreational Horseback Riding Sector Grows Over Past Year

ANNAPOLIS, MD (June 14, 2021) — Maryland's recreational horseback riding sector has grown since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to recent surveys conducted by the Maryland Horse Industry Board (MHIB). Online surveys were sent to horse-related businesses across the state in early April 2021 to gauge the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

MHIB sent surveys to licensed stable owners; horse show and event organizers; and tack and farm equipment store owners. These surveys were voluntary and conducted via Google Forms. They were informal and not weighted.

Survey [results](#) showed:

- About 35% of the licensed stable respondents experienced an increase in business;
- Over 28% of horse show and event organizers reported an increase in business; and
- Replies from a sampling of five tack and farm equipment stores showed a 60% increase in business.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every industry and business,” said Maryland Agriculture Secretary Joe Bartenfelder. “The results of these informal surveys show that interest in Maryland's horse industry and recreational riding is at an all-time high and reflects what we have been hearing from members of Maryland's horse community over the past year.”

These findings correspond with anecdotal accounts from the industry over the past year. In 2020, the number of riding and boarding stables licensed by MHIB grew from 728 to 781 stables, marking a 7% increase.

Bonnie Erbé, stable owner of Soft Landing Farm, saw a noticeable increase in requests for lessons and riding at her facility in Prince George's County. After posting on Facebook asking if other stable owners have seen a similar influx in business, Erbé said, “The consensus seems to be that barns within an hour of Washington, D.C., Baltimore, or other cities were being overwhelmed with requests for lessons and riding.”

MHIB officials also heard that stable operators in rural areas of the state like Cumberland, St. Michaels, Centreville, and North East have experienced a significant boost in business. The survey findings correspond with trends in other outdoor recreational activities, such as increased traffic at [state parks](#) and heightened interest in hiking, biking, fishing, tennis, and golf.

“During the pandemic, folks were clamoring for safe, outdoor activities that encompassed fresh air and exercise,” said MHIB Chair Jim Steele. “We are proud to see Maryland's stable owners and show organizers were quickly able to pivot and implement strict public health protocols at their facilities.

Their fast action allowed for more Marylanders to experience horseback riding. Now, we hope that the industry can maintain this momentum and provide safe and quality experiences to even more citizens.”

Following COVID-19 closures, horseback riding became one of the first types of activities to resume in early May 2020. At that time, stables were allowed to gradually re-open with stringent public health and safety protocols in place. Horse shows were able to resume in June 2020. Over the past winter, horseback riding was one of the few group sports that was allowed to continue due to its inherent socially-distanced nature and open setting.

To view the results of the survey, please visit [MHIB's website](#). For more information, please contact MHIB's Executive Director Ross Peddicord at ross.peddicord@maryland.gov or (240) 344-0000.

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