

# Market Research for *Sonoma County Equestrian Complex*

May 31, 2009

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**Purpose:**

To obtain comments from owners of equine or related businesses about their knowledge and satisfaction with the current equine facilities and resources in Sonoma County and their opinions about having a world class equestrian facility in the county.

**Procedure:**

An interview script was created with 9 questions some of which were multipart. A total of 14 participants were interviewed. The participant groups were: 5 breeders, 4 trainers, and 5 equine related business professionals. Participant names were drawn from the Sonoma County Horse Council resource booklet.

The interviews were held over the phone during a seven day period. The participants consisted of people from around the county representing breeders, venues, and businesses (see table below).

Participants	Location	Breed/Venue/Business
<b>Breeders</b>		
B1	Petaluma	American Saddlebreds
B2	Sonoma	Gypsy Vanners
B3	Penngrove	Miniature Driving Horses
B4	Fulton	Quarter Horses
B5	Sebastopol	Quarter Horses
<b>Trainers:</b>		
T1	Forestville	Dressage & jumping
T2	Santa Rosa	Cutting horses
T3	Santa Rosa	Western & English pleasure, driving
T4	Petaluma	Eventing
<b>Commercial:</b>		
C1	Petaluma	Manager of Hunt & Behrens feed store
C2	Santa Rosa	Rancher & hay distributor
C3	Sonoma	Horse importer & attorney
C4	Petaluma	Financial advisor & manager
C5	Petaluma	Western apparel & accessories

## Questions and Responses

1. *I would like hear your opinions on the horse facilities and resources currently available in Sonoma County.*

*Do you feel that there are sufficient equestrian facilities to meet the needs of horses and riders in the county?*

**B1:**

I will be very honest with you. The only public centers of which I am aware are the Fairgrounds and Petaluma Riding and Driving Club. They are bare bones operations. My impression is that the only others are private like the Santa Rosa Equestrian Center and Riverside.

No, I do not feel there are sufficient equestrian facilities to meet the needs of horses and riders in the County. The Sonoma State study said there are 18,000 horses here. Why don't we have facilities to accommodate all those horses? Santa Rosa [Junior College] has some facility in Forestville, but I haven't seen it yet.

**B2:**

The only facility I know about is the Fairgrounds. I used to go out on trails but not anymore. Jack London has closed off a lot of trails to horses. Annadel used to have a number of trails, but after they change the footing it was not as good, especially when it rains. The bike traffic created a big problem because the bikers don't know about horse safety and how they can easily scare a horse. I think too many trails have been closed off.

The Fairgrounds is not sufficient to have a large event; the Lyttle Cow Palace has poor lighting and the metal benches are not comfortable. It would be nice to have a larger facility to have events throughout the year especially to accommodate driving. The Lyttle Cow Palace is too small for driving.

**B3:**

Current resources are minimal. There is a lack of education of the public; they don't know what is needed to properly show horses. There is a general ignorance of what is needed for maximum enjoyment of participants and observers. There is a need to increase public education which can be beneficial.

The show grounds are passable, doable; something is better than nothing. But they are not sufficient for running multiple disciplines. The arena footing is not well understood - it is too deep for driving cart competitions. An improved arena would help people in the county and outsiders.

I stopped riding trails a few years ago because bikers made it unsafe. The parks should have staggered days for riders and bikers. There was always a lot of tension between the bikers and riders. It wasn't safe; a spooked horse could go over the trail edge. I had several run ins with people driving too fast in the parking lots. It is difficult to make everyone happy. An Advisory Board, like the Horse Council, needs to sit on the City Council. Disciplines should not be mixed in the parks.

There is a growing awareness of horses in the county that is helping family units and can improve family quality time. I get three to five requests a week for family visits to see the miniature horses on our farm.

The County needs an organized, safe place for observers. An enhanced horse industry would bring recognition and profit for the County.

The private barns meet the needs for specific riders, but not other disciplines. They are high end and expensive. Private clubs need facilities to support their organizations. Sonoma County needs something like CAL Expo with areas for different disciplines.

**B4**

The [horse] facilities are one of the unfortunate aspects that have adversely affected shows; they are too expensive. They could be sufficient, if they would be exclusively dedicated to horse and riders, but they are not, and that makes it difficult. The fancy new [horse] facility at the Junior College that was supposed to be available to the community, but isn't.

**B5:**

No. Primarily we need a large venue to support the shows we would like to have now and in the future. We need to attract bigger trainers. We could benefit economically as a community and from a recreational standpoint.

**T1:**

Sonoma County facilities run the gamut from people who don't do anything with their horses to high end aspiring riders. The county is reasonably well served in terms of facilities.

**T2:**

The only place that I like is Sandy Bonelli's because it is set up for my needs, is clean, and well maintained. Most places are English. I like my facility, it meets my needs and looks very tidy.

**T3:**

The only resources we have is the Sonoma County Horse Council booklet with names of businesses, but it is not handy for me. I train horses and rely on the average person with a horse or cow in their back yard. The booklet doesn't help me. I get business by word of mouth.

The facilities are Hoofbeat Park, my ranch, the Fairgrounds, maybe the Wrangler arena in Sebastopol - if it still exists.

We have been doing horse shows since the 60's. Participation goes in cycles. Some years there are lots of kids and families, but it is not consistent. We used to have a lot of Western riders; now it is mostly English. The stables are now more discipline specific (jumping or western pleasure). They have shows for only their discipline and typically only for the people who board at their own places.

We have shows at our ranch, but we never know what people will want because we don't require pre show sign ups.

We have 350 addresses, but if we get 30 people at our shows, we are lucky. These are folks with trailers. Most backyard folks don't have trailers and depend on transportation from their trainer if they want to go to a show off their boarding facility. We have English and Western classes the same day. We used to have 20-30 riders in the Western Pleasure classes; now we get about 12. English horses now dominate the area.

I think the current facilities are sufficient, but the problem (other than the economy) is the management of the Fairgrounds. They have chased away the national and regional and rated shows, and have hurt the general county economy, such as hotels, restaurants, and stores. The Fairgrounds is too expensive; they charge you a lot for every little thing, like dragging an arena.

Reno is a beautiful facility. Why would anyone go to the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds? The biggest factor for show facilities is insurance.

**T4:**

There are good resources on a small scale. But there is limited parking, warm-up areas, stabling, and the footing is inconsistent and not good quality. The current facilities do not encourage out of town use. The problem is mostly capacity. The area can put on small shows, but the County's handicap is putting on large shows that motivate out of town participants. If we had a place to host championship shows, it would put us on the map. The county will never host championship shows without bigger facilities.

**C1:**

The Fairgrounds is a great asset, but I hear from my customers that horses are not welcome there. I don't know much about the Shone facility, but hear it might be a good place for a horse event. I would like a better trail system on the West side of Hwy 101 - in the Petaluma area. I think a long term lease (25 years) for the Sonoma Marin Fairgrounds would be a good idea.

**C2:**

I am not a horse person. There are all kinds of facilities, but they are pricy. I sell hay to a lady in Sonoma that has a covered arena. The current facility seems sufficient to meet the needs and there are lots of trails.

**C3:**

The only facilities I know of are Jack London and Annadale. They are great for riding because they are large. The Fairgrounds is available for shows. There are more facilities in Sonoma than in Marin. They seem sufficient. The county trails get high marks, they are good. We go to horse shows in other states. We aren't going back to Del Mar horse shows anymore because they are so unfriendly to horse people.

**C4:**

There are very limited public facilities - only the Fairgrounds - and it is not friendly to horse people. It best accommodates rodeo events. There are limited facilities for cattle, parking, cattle trucks, and warm up areas. There are no ranches anymore that host Western events.

I do not feel there are sufficient equestrian facilities to meet the needs of horses and riders in the county because there are such a large population of horses and different disciplines. Most of riding and competing is held elsewhere.

The big shows in the 70's were the Golden State Show and the California State Shows. They were two week events and people came from all over the country for them. The big English shows are now mostly down South like in Thermal, Indio. There are few Western shows and fewer big ones because there are no facilities that fulfill current needs.

**C5:**

No. There is only one facility - the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds which is not horse friendly. I don't think there are sufficient facilities here. If we had a facility devoted to horse activities, it would be well used.

**2. Describe your role or the role of your business into the Sonoma County horse scene? Are you a native? If not, why did you come here?****B1:**

We have been in Sonoma County for 12 years. We came here for a large piece of property and we loved Sonoma County. We were looking for a unique property with a horse set up with a covered arena, large hay storage, good weather and easy access to the San Francisco Bay Area. Sonoma County was ideal in every regard. It seemed that locating in Sonoma would be a good pairing of American bred horses and American wines. We were trying to compete our American bred horses with European horses and since American wineries were competing with European wines. It seemed a good match for us.

**B2:**

I am a breeder of Gypsy Vanner horses and was born and raised in Sonoma. My family were the \_\_\_\_\_ and my road is named after my family.

**B3**

I raise, breed and show miniature horses. I have been in Sonoma County for 25 years. I previously lived in Marin and boarded horses there. I moved to Sonoma County because I wanted to have horses on my own property. Sonoma County was convenient and allowed me to easily commute to San Rafael for my job.

**B4**

I have a Quarter Horse breeding ranch. I have been here since retiring [as a [Federal District Judge] in 1990. I had a small ranch in Sonoma County and moved to it. I came here because there wasn't many places like Sonoma County to live. When I first started coming to Sonoma County, I was a visitor.

**B5:**

I am a breeder. I am not a native. We moved to Sonoma County to be able to have horses.

**T1:**

I am a boarding facility manger and a trainer. I am not a native and came here because I was offered a job here training horses. I exercised race horses for 10 years at the Fairgrounds and Golden Gate Fields. I

lived in a trailer at the Fairgrounds until they shut down the track as a training facility which is why I went to Golden Gate Fields. I have been in Sonoma County for 20 years.

**T2:**

I have a training facility for cutting horses. I am not a native and came here because of a job opportunity.

**T3:**

I am a horse trainer and riding instructor. I moved to here in 1963 with my mom who had an Arab Ranch on Llano Road. I have been training horses since 1966.

**T4:**

I am a riding trainer and breeder. I was born in Connecticut but have lived in California since I was four. I moved from Napa to Sonoma in 1999 because I could find property and have a business here. The wineries were crowding out horse owners in Napa.

**C1:**

My company provides livestock feed supplies and bedding. The majority of our feed is for food animals. We retail 30-40% feed for horses and manufacturing 10% for horses. I was born here.

**C2:**

I was born here. My ranch has been in my family for more than 100 years. I have ranched here for more than 50 years. I raise and sell hay and sheep.

**C3:**

We import horses from Europe. We have had our facility in Sonoma County since 2002. We came here because it was more horse friendly than Marin, is beautiful, and we had a favorable impression of the area.

**C4:**

I am a Sales Executive in Petaluma and married to a horse trainer. I was born in Petaluma and have ridden horses since I was 10 years old - for 46 years and I competed in the big shows.

**C5:**

I used to have a Western clothing shop [in Petaluma] but now have an on-line accessories and horse tack business with men's formal wear. I have been in Sonoma County 30 years. I came here because of my husband. We chose Sonoma County and came from the East coast in 1979 from a small town and rural area. The East bay was too expensive. We came here because it was less expensive.

**3. *How important is the equestrian industry to the county? How important is it to have a vibrant equestrian community in the county? What does that do for the county?***

**B1:**

Very important. This county used to heavily depend on dairy and poultry. Agriculture has shifted to grapes and wine followed by equestrians. The farming business is catching. We need more attention paid to it. Extremely important because of economic aspects. The San Francisco Bay area is a very competitive place. Everybody is driven to compete. In Marin, we are increasingly losing contact with the natural world. Horses provide a natural connection the world. They play a vital role in the ecology of the world. We forget that animals play a role in this; it's not just people. Horses help people with autism. People need a connection with the natural world. A horse brings power to the equation - they give kids a power of self that they can't find any other way.

**B2:**

I was more active in the hunter, jumper world. I am not sure how many events are held now. There are still quite a few facilities. It is a shame so many places have closed down, but there are a lot of horses and barns. The Pony club is really important in town. I think there are a lot of horses.

It is definitely important. Events like *Dressage in the Wine Country* are a big draw for events like this.

**B3:**

Important. Horses are most definitely important to the country. Sonoma County is famous for its wine. There needs to be more recognition of what horses can do for Sonoma County. Sonoma County provides agriculture heritage and is starting to capitalize on that. People want to get back to good old fashion values. Sonoma County offers that opportunity. Sonoma County is blessed with the tourist industry. It needs to capitalize on the horse industry.

**B4**

Important because it is the second biggest agriculture interest. It has a huge contribution to the county economy. Horse people spend a substantial amount of money in the county. It would be very painful to the county if horses were less represented. Other impacts include recreation. Horses offer a place for young people to get active and off the streets - where people are more than happy to mentor them.

**B5:**

It is an unrecognized, tremendous resource. It generates a tremendous amount of money to the county from real estate to construction to supplies. A large facility would add another dynamic to that economic impact.

**T1:**

Horses are hugely important. They are the second highest agriculture income for the county. Since the horse industry already exists, it makes sense to foster and magnify it. What we have here are burgeoning Olympic riders. They are on the cusp. However, people that get really good here have to go elsewhere else to train at high competitive levels.

An active horse industry supplies income, supports people, and provides good things for people to do. Horses improve the quality of life and taxes because horse people buy related goods. It is a high end deal and lucrative.

**T2:**

It is very important because it brings in so much money and associate industries. It is second to grapes. It would behoove people to become more proactive about promoting the horse industry. It would make the county understand how important horses are. It could help get more horse infrastructure in the County. The biggest thing in the equine community is that it is not organized.

Horses bring in tons of money and unify family styles and activities. The horse industry needs more exposure. The Horse Council needs to expose everyone to the horse industry. The horse industry is a big money earner which is not recognized and doesn't get community support.

**T3:**

Important, quite important. We have lots of trails and the second largest agriculture income producer. It is very important to have horses in a rural community. Back yard horses are very important to the county. The horse community should be active - like the clubs we used to have in Sonoma County. A lot of the kids that used to show horses are now grown up and participating in other type of horses sports. The Rincon Riders are now doing shows for fun. It is important to have horse organizations and clubs to get kids riding.

**T4:**

Extremely important.

**C1:**

The importance depends on the industry. I'd like to differentiate professional horse people from recreational people. Professionals are important so that we can have recreation. The professional needs a market; the recreational people need the support structure. The equine industry is an expense rather than an income. Hobby sales increase taxes. I am aware of a study done by Sonoma State, but have not seen the report.

**C2:**

Important. It would certainly bring in a lot of revenue to the county. If it weren't for all the horses, I don't know where I would sell my oat hay. Horses are good for sales businesses and suppliers. Property values are out of site, there is no way people can buy property. People who have horses have helped keep prices up. Most of the people hauling horses down the freeway and using horse trails are women. I see couples hauling on the week ends.

**C3:**

Very important. The stats show the Sonoma County is the second highest agriculture income source. That's big! It adds to agriculture diversity, and creates a by product in the high demand for manure by the wineries. There aren't that many places to live well. Sonoma County preserves horse sports and the industry is part of our heritage. It offers a lot of riding and raising and boarding which is a diminishing resource.

**C4:**

Hugely important - like a stealth issue - people don't know how important the horse industry is. It involves 50-100 vendors, suppliers, repairs, auto dealers. It is not just horses, but all the peripheral industries that benefit from people having horses.

Sonoma County is one of the largest populations of horses in the country. It is stupid of the county not to exploit, promote, and support it.

This is a huge revenue potential for Sonoma County where everyone wins - rather than having the county have punitive rules for horse owners. The county only sees the horse industry as a fee or tax and are missing other opportunities.

**C5:**

It is very important because it keeps the flow going. Everything is interconnected - the feed stores and other businesses are supported by the horse industry.

**4. Do you feel people consider a strong horse-friendly environment be an attractant to settle in the County?****B1:**

I do and will. I think we see two things. There are very urban people and the rural group. The urban people first think moving to a rural area is a good idea but then they complain about flies. People want a beautiful landscape. They want their families and kids to explore their dreams. Sonoma County would do well to position itself to have a combination of wine and horses.

**B2:**

I don't know. It used to be when I was growing up, people could afford horses.

**B3:**

If they are interested in outdoor and family values, definitely. Sonoma County has so much diversity - more than other areas.

**B4**

Many of us would be.

**B5:**

Very definitely so.

**T1:**

Only horse people.

**T2:**

On yeah, of course, but it is not a unified effort.

**T3:**

I don't know. I think it depends on why they want to come here. If they want to move into Santa Rosa, maybe not. But if they want to move to a rural area and complain about flies, they should go back to where they came from.

**T4:**

Absolute, that is what brought me here.

**C1:**

Our environment is friendly for all outdoor recreation. There are good trail systems which attract all people.

**C2:**

I imagine so. It would benefit the county and places to ride. People would now rather see horses in pastures than vineyards. People thank God there is livestock in the fields rather than vineyards, Many people who move here build their barns first and live in mobile homes.

**C3:**

It attracts tourists more than settlers. It certainly attracted us. We wanted a horse friendly place. We have a second home in Greenbrae but it does not allow any livestock.

**C4:**

No. The community needs are not even considered. People don't think about it. It is a big missed opportunity, and getting more unfriendly. There are so many back yard horses and 4Hers, FFA, and high school rodeos.

**C5:**

Yes, if I were moving to Northern California, I would definitely go where it was horse friendly.

**5. What PUBLIC facilities are you aware of here for horse competitions?**

*a. Describe the quality of what these facilities offer/ desirability*

*b. Do you think they meet the needs of competitors? (Probe for costs, access and attitudes (fairgrounds)).*

*c. How far away do you think competitors typically travel to compete here?*

**B1:**

The people at the Fairgrounds say the horse industry doesn't matter here. The Fairgrounds have run down conditions. The only thing that got it a boost is the new turf track. It doesn't have a sense of focus. It doesn't meet the needs of competitors because you rarely see [large] numbers of competitions being held. People travel a long way from here to go to shows, but not to come here. The largest distance people travel is Sacramento, the travel is very local. If there were a world class center here, people would come from out of state, across the country, and Canada.

**B2:**

The facilities are decent. Chris Beck is good. The facilities need upgrading.

**B3:**

We have used the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds. The Petaluma Fairgrounds seems to be more for agriculture, not for horses. It is not set up for horse shows; there are no accommodations. There are private barns at Riverside and Flying Cloud, but they are not advertised. People outside the click don't know about them.

The distance people will travel depends on the discipline venues. Our shows start in Scottsdale, then go to Burbank Griffith Park, Reno, Oregon, Rancho Murrieta, Brookside, and Elk Grove. I have gone on this circuit.

**B4**

The public places are the Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa and Petaluma. The Santa Rosa Fairgrounds is not a place that has been friendly to horse events. It is adequate, but could be better.

Horse showers travel as far as Southern California, and sometimes San Diego, to come to events at the Fairgrounds.

**B5:**

The Lyttle Cow Palace, but seems to be a very unfriendly environment in recent years. It doesn't have a large enough venue to attract big name competitions or trainers. It isn't big enough to host any big name shows or trainers that would fuel our economy and tourist dollars.

The horse industry could provide another destination like the wine industry provides a tourist destination. No it doesn't meet the needs.

We need to look at how many dollars flow out of this county that goes to areas that host big shows like Rancho Murrieta to see how much money we are losing. A missed opportunity.

They don't. and that's the problem. Our people travel elsewhere to show. So it is a cash outflow instead of a cash inflow.

**T1:**

The Fairgrounds and maybe Hoofbeat Park. The quality is adequate for the levels of shows there. But it couldn't host a world class event. The footing is not good enough. It needs big grass fields for jumping and eventing.

It doesn't meet the needs of competitors because people have to go elsewhere to go to better, high level shows. If you are local and you want to train at a high level, you have to go to Rancho Murrieta.

I don't think people travel far to show here. Why would you? What we have exists everywhere.

**T2:**

The Fairgrounds, but it is not horse friendly. Its facilities are mediocre. The management is a problem and it is expensive. For the amount of money it brings it, it should be friendlier to horses. Petaluma is not horse user friendly, not set up, and doesn't cater to horse people.

The facilities at the Fairground are not sufficient. Some of the private English facilities are better than our public facilities. Rancho Murrieta is a good faculty because it allows different activities, like cutting and dressage.

I don't know how far people come to show here. I can't imagine the classy English people coming here. The facilities aren't good enough.

**T3:**

The Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa and Petaluma, but Petaluma is only used for 4H in June. There are no box stalls there. I like the fact that everything is close to the [Santa Rosa] Fairgrounds. I like a central location. The Lyttle Cow Palace has bad footing; the Chris Beck arena has a bigger and better arena. It meets the community horse needs, but it is too expensive making it not feasible for shows anymore.

The greatest distance that people will go to the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds is from Northern California.

**T4:**

The Fairgrounds and Riverside are open to the public, but Riverside is privately owned. The Fairgrounds is limited and not that well leveraged. There are no frequent shows open to the public. The Fairgrounds seem to be an occasional facility. The parks and recreational system is pretty good.

The quality of the footing is a problem. The permanent stables are good, but need maintenance. It is short on warm up space. They are good places for trailers. It is impossible to have perfect footing because the footing is too multi purpose; sometimes there are parts from the Demolition Derby in the ground.

I think the distance people come is a 2 hour radius. I drive 8-10 hours to go to a class facility. People from here go to Montana, Washington, Thermal, and Griffith Park to go to a class dressage event.

**C1:**

The Fairgrounds - all others are private. It is adequate, but could be improved. I think people might travel 5 hours to go there.

**C2:**

The Fairgrounds have priced themselves out of business. I don't know of other facilities. There is nothing like Rancho Murrieta here. The County doesn't meet the needs compared to competitors. People think nothing of going far away to a show. People in Sonoma County have to travel to go to shows. Clovis and Oakdale seem to now be the competitive world. Sonoma County is not good for competitors.

**C3:**

The Fairgrounds. Others aren't public.

**C4:**

The only public one is the Fairgrounds and they don't like horses. What is needed is a horse facility usable all year round. The quality of the Fairgrounds is OK - there are good rodeo chutes and panels to hold cattle. It meets the needs for a few shows a year, but not for big shows. The steel stalls are not nice and it floods. It is a crappy place.

People would come to a top notch facility. Who would want to hang out at the Fairgrounds?

I have no idea how far people come to show at Sonoma County. No big shows are here. In the early 70's, people came from across the country to show here. They had to split up classes in the Chris Beck arena because the classes were so big.

**C5:**

The Santa Rosa Fairgrounds is the only one. The Fairgrounds could be a great place but they don't know how to put good ground in. My horse has almost fallen there several times. The ground is a difficult issue for me. Sandy Bonelli [world champion cutting horse rider from Petaluma] didn't come back after one day at the last show because of the footing. The loping pen was especially bad.

The Fairgrounds meet the needs of competitors in that it has good covered facilities and stalls, but has other things to overcome like prices.

People come from as far away as Bakersfield and Nevada.

**6. Were you in the County during the "hay-days" of horse shows - when large scale events like the Snaffle Bit Futurity, etc. were held here (from about the 50's to the 80's)?**

**Why do you think these moved away?**

**Would it be desirable to improve the horse event facilities in the County to once again attract state and national horse shows?**

**B1:**

No [I was not here then].

**B2:**

No [I was not here then]. The Fairgrounds used to draw lots of people. It used to be mostly Western, but now it is mostly English. The decrease is because of insurance.

I think it would be [a good idea to improve the facilities]. They need to advertise and make it something spectacular to draw the public and people who show. It needs to be high class and good quality, have money awards, breed shows, and open classes for all breeds. The public wants to see new breeds - that would be a draw.

**B3:** No

**B4**

No

But I have heard of the numbers of shows that used to be here. This was the "Cutting Horse Capital of California." Other places have been more receptive to horse shows.

Yes [the facilities should be improve], it goes without saying.

**B5:**

No [I was not here then]. They are a wonderful legend.

**T1:** Yes

**T2:** Yes.

The shows left because the facilities are not good enough and sponsorship money is hard to get. The community is not aware of the value of horses and horse events. The Snaffle Bit Futurity brought in millions of dollars to the county. The vendors don't like going to the Fairgrounds.

**T3:** Yes

The big shows moved away because of politics, expenses, and an aging population.

To bring people back to the area would require multi skill levels for shows, such as the old Class B shows. Lower level riders don't want to compete with professionals.

**T4:**

No [I was not here then].

**C1:**

No [I was not here then].

**C2:** Yes.

The shows would go on for days. I don't know why the big shows stopped.

Yes improvements would be a good idea, if the local people would participate.

**C3:**

No [I was not here then].

**C4:** Yes.

The shows stopped because of expenses and rent. The management is not happy to see and help horse people. The arenas are not nice. There are limited hotels and motels. The shows are mostly English now. It is absolutely desirable to improve the horse show facilities. It would be financially beneficial to the county. Look how nice Rancho Murrieta is. It is easy to run shows there.

**C5:**

No [I was not here then].

**7. If a large piece of land were made available in the county with a variety of arenas (for different disciplines), training facilities, trails, horse camping, a vet hospital, etc., how do you think this would benefit the local economy?**

**B1:**

It would be tremendous. We have a strong tourism industry. If we had an equestrian center of that scale, it would be a big draw. The people that visit would go the center. If we don't promote our horses, we will forget our history. I can't think of another area that would be a good place for a center. Sonoma County is unique in the world. What a fantastic opportunity.

**B2:**

I think it would be good. There are a lot of wealthy residents (from Marin, San Francisco and Sacramento) where people would come to participate if there was a world class facility. It should have clinics and three day sport events. It would be a draw. Sonoma County would attract more people.

**B3:**

The feed stores would benefit, as well as hotels, restaurants. It would really be a win-win for everybody. I don't see any drawbacks to it. It would need proper promotion. It would be a great support for horse people and the general population. People come to Sonoma County for country living that includes horses.

**B4**

It is the number one wishful thinking. It would be a center where all various horse activities could grow and benefit. There are 8 or 10 different groups of horse activities that could benefit.

**B5:**

Tremendously. This would become a destination to move to. People want the facilities near by. Best of both worlds. Look at the Pioneer Vet Hospital in Oakdale, the amount of money brought in is huge. Because we are talking about facilities for million dollar horses. The income is phenomenal. Money just from a vet hospital is huge. Plus more money for tack stores, etc.

**T1:**

People would come for training, would get higher end trainers who would be willing to train here. I had a friend in Canada who wouldn't come to Sonoma County because there was no high level training facilities. She ended up being long listed for the Olympics and was in the World Equestrian Games.

The big shows are in Southern California. The center would need resident trainers that had clients. People who train at the lower levels at smaller private facilities would then have the opportunity to move up to higher level training at the center. It would positively impact restaurants and shopping.

**T2:**

Oh hell yeah, big time [to improve horse event facilities]. The Horse council needs to be pushy and show how much money a horse event center could generate and the benefits.

**T3:**

It depends on who is running it. Organization is really important and it needs professional people who know what they are doing and won't let the center sit idle. Encourage horse people near and far to use it. It would have to be run on a corporate scale with a Board with horse background. Get the community involved and cultivate the community. It will have to have good marketing and management, be exhibitor friendly. It could have a hotel and an RV park for visitors and exhibitors.

**T4:**

People who are professionals and their clientele would gravitate to this center. I know several people who show who move to be close to their trainer - and then the men follow the women. When things started to happen in Monterey [the new event facility], several trainers started to move there.

**C1:**

That depends if it required tax payer funding.

**C2:**

It would be bound to attract people outside the area. It would increase sales of gas, tires, hotels, and restaurants.

**C3:**

Absolutely. It would be a natural attraction to use and frequent and for outgoing communities. It is getting more difficult to have big horse events, like *Cavalía*, in the area. It had to be held in a parking lot. The Cow Palace is impossible. A horse center here would bring money into the county. We would

consider hosting all Friesians show at the center. There are between 50-75 Friesian owners. We have sold quite a few to Southern Oregon and Reno.

**C4:**

People from all over would come. Other people would hold 2 to 4 week shows. People with horses have money which would help the Sonoma County economy. This is a tourist destination. People would rather come here than go the Thermal - in the desert. A facility would help the infrastructure and make sense. It would attract national events and futurities. Sonoma County is God's country, but not at the Fairgrounds.

**C5: Yes**

I think it would. Hunter jumper riders spend a lot of money. People need a place to stay.

**8. *What would you like to see included in such a center? What would attract YOU to use it? Or, what would motivate you to invite friends from out of the area to come and use it?***

**B1:**

Multiple arenas. All disciplines recognized: Western and English, and eventing. Trails that are truly fantastic. A museum would be wonderful. Having a center that would endear the public like the Kentucky Center. Having a really classy California recreational facility would be mind boggling. Having an historical aspect to bring in the general public.

**B2:**

It should have a large covered arena for riding and driving, cross county and be used for all disciplines. It would be very beneficial to have more public relations. I was trying to get the Press Democrat to do an article on my horses. If there was more publicity and free publications, there would be a digger draw. There is an opportunity to hold world class events.

**B3:**

The first thing would be safety. Consistent organization. All weather arenas - covered for driving would be fantastic. I can't do driving in the winter. Other people would be interested in the center. It could unify and make a stronger community. Everyone would benefit.

**B4**

Parking for trailers, stalls, adequate cattle pens, substantial size arenas, and spectator sections. At the present time, we have to transport horses to shows. A lot of people can't do this. Distant shows don't draw us.

**B5:**

Arenas with good footing, that's a biggie. Enclosures. Something available to the public to use between shows. Have boarding stables leased out. Need a venue like Rancho Murrieta to bring in big name clinicians. Would generate a lot of income and notoriety. We could become a destination venue which is an opportunity we are missing. A full service center. Rental space for a vet clinic.

**T1:**

Facilities to train for Olympic level horses and trainers who would want to train there. People would want to go there. Recreational facilities like trails. Training facilities like the European Pony School which supported Oakridge Training Facility for years because ponies don't cost much, go 12 hours a day, and lots of kids come for lessons.

The community would be profitable. It would bring in the public.

It should have a really good restaurant. Thunderbird Equestrian Center in Canada has a great restaurant. It is attached to the barn and is always full during shows. If the [Sonoma County] center had a restaurant, people would go there to eat and watch horse events.

It should have a place for cows and facilities for working cows. It would be great to have a vet hospital that our vets could work with. Instead of taking a sick or injured horse to Davis and risking it dying in the

trailer, we could take it to the center's hospital. If there was a vet hospital in Sonoma County, my vet could do surgery there.

**T2:**

All of the stuff: arenas, courses, facilities for simultaneous events, vet facility, feed store. I would use it if it was good quality, well maintained, decorated, dust free. It needs to be something classy as opposed to the Fairgrounds which is not. The management needs to be agreeable. We need a well managed government body willing to work with the county to promote the horse industry and a body that will help horse owners. It needs to address the big issues, not small ones - like trails in Bodega Bay. We need a big time go getter. The idea for the complex is perfect.

**T3:**

It should have a museum, nice restaurant and be a first class facility, have a recreation area - something for kids to do. To make it work, it will have to attract the public. I just had people visiting from Florida today asking what they could do here. It should provide something to see and do. I would like it to have a place to hold conventions and clinics.

I would use it to drive my horses and work cows. Of course, you'd pay a fee. I would like it to have an obstacle course and cross-country course. I could help design it. It should have stalls. The Fairground is so restrictive, it chases people away.

**T4:**

Covered warm up arenas, parking with decent drainage, year around, all weather facility, good solid stabling. Good footing can make or break a facility and should be discipline specific. This would be a good opportunity in the future when things improve. If there was a quarantine area, importing horses will increase. People don't like to take their horses to Davis because of exposure to diseases.

We need a place with capacity for clinics. Families will compete to spend a week for their kids to go to. Dads can go to the wine country. Napa wasn't horse friendly at all.

**C1:**

Family friendly events on a regular basis. Schooling shows, clinics, play days. It should apply to groups outside horses. The more people it attracts, the more support you'll get. It should be within a few miles of Highway 101, and high - out of the flood zone. Adobe soil is out. Lakeville is on the valley floor and floods. The valley between Annadel and Sugarloaf would be a good place - off Highway 12.

**C2:**

It should include an area for rodeo events. Horse shows are too slow for me. It should have a museum. I would go there. My wife would use the facilities more than me. It should be within 10 miles of Santa Rosa, but not near the Petaluma Riding and Driving club - it is too cold there, especially in the evening. It needs to be in a warmer place. It should not be near the laguna in Sebastopol. It needs to have tranquil weather. Windsor is high and dry; there are no cold winds here. It needs to have nice evenings for barbeques after shows. The Lakeville Highway area gets too much wind. River Road would be good; it's in the wine country and the soil conditions are better. Don't put the center where there is adobe soil. It needs to be located with easy access to and from the freeway.

**C3:**

An equestrian center would be an attraction for horse shows across the U.S. We could host the Grand National. The horse facilities in Reno and Las Vegas are difficult because they have too many rules.

**C4:**

Different arenas so different disciplines could use them simultaneously. Good stalls, staffing, food, feed store, vendor set up, training rental facilities, parking for trailers and RVs, trails, cross country and 3 day event grounds, dressage facilities, judges stands, a vet facility. It needs to be easily accessible and user friendly, pleasant, high class, and easy in and out - a first class facility.

**C5:**

For me, I use Rancho Murrieta as the bench mark [for a horse eventer center]. It has a good atmosphere and the ground is fantastic. The food is delicious, it is high end, quality food. We need a center to host anything, there are a jillion barrel races and roping is a big deal. There is no place to do these activities. My son's finance shows Arabs and they recently had to go to Red Bluff and Elk Grove to show.

**9. *Lastly, is there anything else that you'd like to talk about on this subject? I want to make sure we're capturing all of your opinions about a potential equestrian complex.***

**B1:**

This is a wonderful time to be thinking about an equestrian center. It would be great for me and my horses. I think it's a tremendous concept and it would have benefits beyond the horse industry.

**B3:**

One thing that is a problem showing at the Fairgrounds is their stall bedding. We can't bed miniatures in straw, so we can't use their stalls unless we put muzzles on the horses.

The new facility will need to be sensitive to different disciplines. The Fairgrounds' attitude has been a problem in the past. The new center will need to have an open attitude and work to community goals.