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**For Immediate Release**

**April 29, 2008**

**Kentucky International Equine Summit ends with  
essential call for unity within the industry**

**Lexington, Kentucky**—Today at the Kentucky International Equine Summit Olympic gold medalist equestrian David O'Connor urged the disparate elements of America's horse industry to work in concert to improvement promotion the sport.

He said that the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games gives America's horse community a unique opportunity to reach a large segment of the public. The games are to be held in September in Lexington, Ky.

He made his remarks on Tuesday at the Kentucky International Equine Summit, sponsored jointly by the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky.

"There will be 700,000 people coming to the games," said O'Connor. "Media from all over the world will be here. This can be a catalyst for promoting horses. These

games won't be back in America for another 25 years.”

O'Connor said that people in horse sports suffer from a “silo mentality” in which they compartmentalize their participation and don't see themselves as part of the overall horse industry. He said that horse organizations must unify to create a promotional resource.

He drew a parallel between horse sports and track and field events. It's difficult to promote javelin throwing, O'Connor pointed out, unless it's packaged as part of the overall sport of track and field. Horse people should think of their participation as being part of the overall sport instead of just their individual discipline, he stressed.

“None of us is big enough to play on the world stage by ourselves,” said O'Connor.

He emphasized that there is a desire among many Americans to interact with horses and it's the responsibility of horse people to reach out to them.

“The economic impact study done by American Horse Country showed that horses are a \$112 billion industry in the United States,” he said. “Americans want to have an association with horses. The USEF wants to create opportunities for people to participate in horse sports.”

Speaking as president of the U.S. Equestrian Federation, O'Connor said that the USEF's “On The Road” outreach program has been successful in increasing the presence of horse sports around the United States.

“We've taken the horse to the public instead of waiting for the public to come to us,” he said. “We need to get horses onto the internet, onto TV, and into the mainstream media.”

## **The Equine Economy in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Speakers came from all corners of the equestrian community, and beyond, yet their messages had several similarities. The importance of unity in the equine industry was echoed through a call for unity and a prompting to explore new methods of promotion during the final day of the Kentucky International Equine Summit.

The upcoming 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, to be held at the Kentucky Horse Park for the event's first venue outside of Europe, is a prime opportunity for horse enthusiasts to help showcase America's love affair with the horse, speakers agreed.

"We have the theme of unity, and the theme of inclusiveness for the 2010 World Games," said John Nicholson, executive director of the Kentucky Horse Park. "All of us here need to talk about legacy. There's opportunity for the United States horse industry to permanently plant the horse in the U.S. consciousness."

An extension of the games, the World Games 2010 Foundation, was formed to "put the time and effort into making sure we put on the very best show, and be commercially responsible," said Terry Johnson, vice president of external relations for the foundation. "We're speaking to a number of different audiences, and have to balance saturating the horse world with helping to grow [equestrian] sports with new people."

Appealing to another part of consciousness is the focus of branding executed by Del Mar Thoroughbred Club. "Your brand is in everything you do," said Craig Dado, vice president of marketing for the racetrack. "You need to commit to it, and you need to control it. Our plan was to make Del Mar sexy, to sell the social scene, and make going to Del Mar a cool thing to do."

The effort has proven to have teeth, as on-track attendance is up 17 percent since the new brand was introduced, said Dado.

Corey Johnson, president of Kentucky Downs in Franklin, said his track's focus was to recognize and cater to the different clienteles. "You have the serious handicapper, and you have those that just want to gamble, be it on horses, slots or sports," he said. "Then you have the sports fan, who loves all kinds of sports, and the entertainment seeker, who would be at his favorite restaurant with the family if he wasn't at the track.

"Sometimes we ignore one type or the other, and we have to appeal to all types of fans," he said. "You have to provide a safe, secure, clean atmosphere. You have to do your research and plan your marketing. If you can't afford to pay a firm, you can learn a lot by just walking around and talking to lots of different people."

One event that knows its market and what works is the All-American Quarter Horse Congress, held annually in Columbus. Recognized as the biggest equine expo in the United States, last year it attracted over 650,000 paid spectators and exhibitors over a many-day span.

Denny Hales, executive vice president of the Ohio Quarter Horse Association, said "the goal of the Congress is to be the mutual fund of the stock market – we do a lot of different things to appeal to lots of different people. There is evolution and constant change in this industry, and we need to embrace that rather than resist it."

Another equine event that has its niche is the Little Brown Jug, held every September at the fairgrounds in Delaware, Ohio. Known as the biggest party in harness racing, Director of Marketing Phil Terry said the Jug survives on its history and tradition. "Everyone in the town of Delaware shares ownership of the event," he said. "I wish everyone had the crowds we do, and that's in spite of

everything we do going against current culture.”

Unlike most American racetracks, the backstretch and barns at the Jug are open to the public, where people can interact with the horsemen and horses, Terry said.

The Florida Carriage Museum and Resort in Weirsdale, Florida, has numerous interactive elements as well, said founder Gloria Austin. “People have very little exposure to large animals anymore,” she said. “And the importance of the horse in history gets very little play. No one teaches the social impact of the horse on civilization.”

Austin said her group has available entire curriculum on teaching about the important role of the horse in history, and urged equine enthusiasts to educate themselves and others.

Horse sport is very much top of mind in England and Ireland, and is deeply imbedded in local culture and history. All facets, including racing, are robust, said Sam Sheppard, chief executive of the European Breeders’ Fund. “Our racing is covered in every newspaper, every day, as well as on television, cable and internet,” he said. “I think that’s what binds people to horses at an early age. Virtually all equine activity today can trace back to England in some way.”

David Osborne, who is a member of the Kentucky legislature, a developer of equine-themed communities, and a horse owner, spoke about the Kentucky Recreational Trails Authority.

Senate Bill 196 “gave teeth” to the development of a trails system, which allows for the government to enter into agreements with private land owners, and provides liability relief for land owners.

Jerry Fruth, president of the U.S. Equine Trails Coalition, is former polo player and champion endurance rider. “There’s a horse population of nine million in this country, and roughly half of them are recreational horses, which includes trail riding, endurance, and hunting. [A quarter] of the horses in the U.S. are in Kentucky or in the states that surround it.

“David’s bill will have tremendous impact,” he said. “In a few years, this will be the best state in the nation to trail ride. People will come here from all over the country, and spend a boat load of money while they are here.”

Osborne said horse people should not be hesitant to contact their legislators. “The squeaky wheel gets the grease,” he said. “We’re not really good at going out and advocating for ourselves. Don’t be afraid to pick up the phone and let them know how important issues are to you personally, and how important they are state-wide.”

## **The Emerging Science of Horse Breeding**

Another important issue raised during the Summit was solutions to pedigree concentrations.

Discussions from a panel of experts included the overabundance of the same bloodlines as a cause for concern for many horse breeders, however measures can be taken to reduce the negative outcomes.

Ken Jackson, co-owner of Kentuckiana Farms in Lexington, said the United

States Trotting Association, has imposed limits on the number of mares that can be bred to a single stallion.

Beginning in 2009, new trotting stallions can be bred to no more than 140 mares per breeding year. Violators will be fined at least \$25,000.

“Standardbreds are losing their genetic diversity at an unacceptable rate,” he said. “Variation is the basis for selective improvement.”

In addition to the mandated limit, Jackson said more stallion lines must be incorporated into future generations. One method of achieving this result is to bring Standardbred stallions from other parts of the world to North America for breeding purposes.

Importation of new bloodlines was popularized decades ago in the Thoroughbred breed and has since resulted in globalization of the pedigrees in those horses raised primarily for racing.

Dan Kenny, a Thoroughbred bloodstock agent based in Lexington, noted the breed can no longer categorize its pedigrees by country.

“We no longer have an American mare or an American stallion,” he said. “We have one Thoroughbred world. Time will tell if we have too much concentration.”

In decades past, breeders sought stallions from other continents, primarily South America and Europe, for mating with domestic mares. Today’s Thoroughbreds now are routinely shipped around the world as breeding stallions. So, even if a breeder imported a foreign horse, his bloodlines would contain the same genes as those in all parts of the world. Unlike other equine breeding industries, artificial insemination is not allowed for Thoroughbreds.

Artificial insemination is popular for a variety of reasons, according to Laura Wipf, owner of Royal Vista Ranches, a full-service Quarter Horse facility in Wayne, Oklahoma.

“The stallions and mares do not have to relocate for breeding,” she said, which reduces overhead costs and minimizes risk of illness and injury.

She also cited convenience, international opportunities, and ability to produce horses from previously-frozen semen of deceased stallions.

Gary Carpenter, executive director of American Quarter Horse Foundation, said modern breeders have the best opportunity to produce good horses because of liberal rules, large information data bases, and expanding technology.

“We have come a long way but we have a long way to go and education is the answer,” he said in reference to producing horses prone to defects.

He said breeders should not be complacent when planning matings. He said ranchers previously tried to improve the breed, but today’s owners tend to breed the type of horse they already have.

Larry Thornton, a Quarter Horse pedigree consultant, said he is frequently asked about close inbreeding, a technique he said results in a very good or a very bad outcome because it can expose undesirable genes that tend to be recessive. For best results, he recommended using a large group with no hidden defects and not putting undesirable horses back into the gene pool.



Several speakers stressed the need for long-term improvement of their breeds.

“We have an obligation to the horse industry,” said Dr. Jim Heird of Colorado State University. He emphasized that today’s breeders should not transfer to the next generation of breeders a horse that is inferior to the previous generation.

### **The Wellbeing of the Competitive Horse**

Communication between the equine and man has always been a mystery. Although it is not in a horse’s genetic makeup to verbally communicate, they “speak” to us all the time. This concept was a common theme throughout all four of today’s panels on the Wellbeing of the Competitive Horse.

Dr. Catherine Kohn, VMD, from the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, acknowledged people who know horse language have special importance in future equine research.

“We need to identify the relevant problems to research,” said Kohn during the panel on “Equine Research: State of the Field.” “But we need bright, intelligent, creative people that work with horses daily and know the problems they experience in order to identify them.”

When Keeneland Race Track installed Polytrack in 2006, it became the third North American facility to transition to this synthetic surface. The reason for the change was revealed during the session on “The Safety of Horses: A Long-Term View.”

“We felt the safety of the horse and rider was not coming first and that was

unacceptable,” Nick Nicholson, President of Keeneland, said. “You need to listen to the horse and do what’s best for him. It’s a tenet that is not used enough in this business.”

During the same session, Bill Casner, co-owner of WinStar Farm in Versailles, Kentucky, concurred with Nicholson, but added some personal insight.

“Horses that have faulty conformation just float over a synthetic surface,” Casner explained. “It is very forgiving and provides young horses with a chance to work through their issues because it allows their bones to remodel. The horse is telling us that he likes this kind of surface and we need to listen.”

In the panel “Veterinary Research on Equine Athletes,” Dr. Mary Scollay-Ward, Association Veterinarian at Calder Race Course and Gulfstream Park said a horse’s body language usually indicates a predisposition to catastrophic injury.

“With most catastrophic injuries, horses do tell you by exhibiting some sort of sign,” Scollay-Ward said. “Except condylar fractures. In my experience, they usually occur in 3-year-olds that are moving quickly through their conditions and forward in their training but there are no outward signs.”

Charlie Hutton, a speaker for the “Experience, Compassion and Handling of the Horse,” owns Hilldale Farm in Princeton, Kentucky and primarily trains reining horses. In his opinion, the key to equine safety is good horsemanship.

“You have to always listen to the horse,” Hutton said. “Horses are creatures of routine and if they act differently than they normally do, there is almost always something wrong. I rode a horse yesterday that seemed tired and was working to get through the ride. I knew something was off and sent him to the vet this morning.”

For more information about the Kentucky International Equine Summit, please visit [www.kyequinesummit.com](http://www.kyequinesummit.com).

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