The Horse Industry has undertaken many new and successful initiatives over the last decade to address the issue of at-risk horses, and those who are in transition.

Rehoming programs, education about responsible ownership, and increased rescue and retirement options have all helped create a better life for horses that were previously without a home.

Although no one knows for certain how many at-risk horses currently exist in the United States, we do know that the number of programs and resources available to help these Equines has improved over the years.

Gelding and spaying horses is an important solution for all involved in the horse industry to consider. Responsible horse owners who prevent their animals’ reproduction can significantly reduce the number of at-risk horses, resulting in improved welfare and resources for the entire Equine population.

For more information please check out:
www.unitedhorsecoalition.org
OWN RESPONSIBLY:

In today’s world, in which far too many horses become at-risk each year, gelding, spaying, and hormone therapy is the responsible choice for many horses. By considering these practices, breeders and owners are “owning responsibly,” and helping to significantly reduce the number of at-risk horses in America.

Although chances are low that horses in a controlled environment will find a way to breed, gelding and spaying horses of minimal breeding quality will also prevent future owners, who may not exercise responsible control, from breeding those horses. The long life expectancy and the frequency with which horses change hands over a lifetime should make this a primary concern of every responsible horse owner.

SPAYING

Ovariectomy, or “spaying,” is a surgical procedure in which a veterinarian removes a mare’s ovaries, rendering her incapable of reproduction. Because of the costs and risks associated with abdominal surgery, spaying is far less common than gelding and is usually reserved for medical reasons, such as ovarian tumors.

While spaying is one way to prevent pregnancy in a mare, it is also an option when, in extreme cases, behaviors associated with estrus make a mare unmanageable, unridable, or dangerous. These may include irritability, aggression, biting, kicking, persistent vocalization, back soreness, and lack of focus. Like gelding, spaying can create future career options that might have been limited by hormone-related behavior.

In less severe cases, hormone therapy may be enough to eliminate or greatly reduce undesirable behaviors. These include synthetic hormone treatments, injectable progesterone, progesterone implants, and intra-uterine devices. While various forms of hormone therapies will keep a mare out of heat, they do not completely stop her from cycling and are not, therefore, guaranteed to prevent pregnancy.

GELDING

In gelding a horse, the veterinarian removes the testicles which produce the hormone testosterone. This is the hormone that is responsible for sperm production as well as aggressive, sometimes dangerous, behavior including fighting and mounting. Left intact, a mature stallion may become progressively more difficult to manage and train as he becomes older.

In most cases geldings are preferred over stallions for pleasure riding and for competition because they are typically calmer, easier to handle, and more tractable. It is for these reasons that a gelding is also more likely to be adopted out of a care facility.

Gelding a horse that is not an attractive commercial breeding prospect may ensure their viability in an alternate career. A stallion or colt with no commercial use as a breeding animal is an unattractive proposition for a new owner for several reasons:

- The owner faces the costs of a gelding surgery in addition to other expenses required to prepare a horse for a new career
- Stallions require specialized housing, fencing, and turnout
- Farm owners and individual horse owners have considerable legal exposure for the actions of their animals

Many prospective buyers are not equipped to house or manage a stallion and therefore may overlook an otherwise suitable horse.

If you would like to help horses at risk or in transition, and would like to be added to the UHC Resource database, please contact uhc@horsecouncil.org, or visit the UHC website at www.unitedhorsecouncil.org