Down on the Farm

Accounting Software
For Horse Owners

by HEATHER SMITH THOMAS

Computers have simplified our lives in many ways, and a growing number of horse owners and breeders are using computers for record-keeping. This can make it easier to keep track of everything from breeding records to financial records.

Lana Knoener (The Russell Meerdink Co. Ltd.) helps explain some of the things the horseman should know when selecting software for a record-keeping program. A wide variety of options are available. Some are much more sophisticated than others. "There are some very simple ones that are easy to use—for the people who would rather be out in the barn than running their computer. Our program, Equifacts, comes in two versions: Basic Equifacts, and Equifacts with Invoicing. They are basically the same program, but the second one has a few more capabilities. It allows you to invoice and track payments, etc.," she says.

"Choosing horse software is worth the time spent researching different programs. Horsemen should decide ahead of time how they want to use it. Some people are looking for a full-fledged accounting program that writes checks and prints IRS (Internal Revenue Service) statements. Some horse owners just want to keep track of medical records, hoof care and deworming schedules for future reference. Most horse owners fall somewhere in between. Any program, even if it's inexpensive, isn't worth the money if you spend hours entering horses and expenses but then find out the program doesn't do what you needed," says Knoener. They feel frustrated at that wasted effort because most of them would much rather be out with their horses than indoors with their computer.

"The nice thing about a computer record-keeping program that works is that you can enter all the health care information about each horse and you don't have to wonder where it is. You don't have to look for a calendar or notebook or diary; it's all right there. It works well for people with a few horses or a lot of horses," she says.

"Our programs have sections for vaccinations, worming, hoof care, lists of names for emergency information, Coggins tests, breeding information, contact information for vet or farrier, etc. You can run reports on different things. If you want a list of all the horses you vaccinated last month and when they are next due, you can print that out," she says. There is a section on general health, in which you can add

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a condition/treatment section to the screen and put in the treatment, who treated the horse, cost, and notes—any further information on that specific condition or treatment. A section called leg watch enables you to enter dates, description, treatment, cost and notes, to track a chronological listing of injuries and treatments on your horses' legs.

"You can do feeding schedules and reports, print those out and post them next to the stall doors," she explains. You might know off the top of your head what each horse gets, but if you have someone else coming in to do it (hired help, or a neighbor doing your chores while you are gone), this can be very helpful.

"It can be nice, if you keep adding new horses. You can also check back to see how much grain you fed to a certain horse last summer. Sometimes you don't keep close track of some things unless you are entering the information into a computer. Once you start using a computer for this you might wonder how you got by before, not keeping track of these things. It's so handy!" she says.

There are several sections on breeding; there is one for stallion bookings (booking date, breeding date, mare, owner, terms, etc.), one for mare produce records, mare breeding records, and a teasing and breeding chart that can be used for any mare you've entered into the program. You can refer back to her charts from previous years. "The breeding/teasing chart prints out blank for posting next to a stall door, or to be sent with the vet, and you can enter the proceedures into the chart in Equifacts."
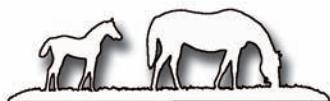
"If you do breeding, it's nice to know when a mare was bred last year and when she delivered, and if there was anything unusual that you want to remember. It's just very helpful to be able to refer back to things and know exactly what's going on. It's nice when the vet comes, because you can give a more complete history on the horse—when and what treatments were given in the past, etc., and what the outcome was," she explains.

There is also a section for training and conditioning, to keep track of dates and the various activities, and a section for racing records or performance records (dates, shows, location, class, etc.), and a section for expense reports. In that section you can enter dates, items and amounts of all your farm expenses, and also keep track of the expenses for

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each horse. "There is a section for miscellaneous expenses that don't fit anywhere else but are specifically for one horse," she says.

The invoicing program available from Equifacts is handy if you are running a business in which you may be billing horse owners for services rendered. "The invoicing part of it just adds that extra capability. You can print all sorts of reports on what various things cost and when they were done. The invoicing portion allows you to print out an invoice for a client—if you board or train horses, etc. It's also nice if you have a partnership and want the other party to be aware of all the different things that are going on—in a very easy-to-look-at format." You can also send reports to your accountant, showing the people you sent invoices to last month, who sent you payments, and if you collected sales tax, etc.

"This software is very affordable. The basic package is $129.95. The invoicing package is $169.95. A person can always buy the basic package to start with and, if they decide later that they want the invoicing too, we just charge the difference between the two. They can keep using the information they already have in there, and just fill in a couple more fields," she says.

The Russell Meerdink Company offers a free 30-day demo for the Basic Equifacts. "Interested parties can download it from our website (www.horseinfo.com) or call (800) 635-6499 to request a free demo CD to stick into your computer," says Knoener.

"People have told us they've found our programs very self explanatory. We send a manual with it, but most people are able to sit down at the computer and install it. The main menu comes up and they realize all they have to do is click a button and enter the horse owner's name and start entering a horse's information. The main menu is just some buttons labeled feeding, vaccinations, etc. You click on them, click the add button and put things in."

This program is easy to use. "We've had a lot of people call us and say their accountant wants them to go to a computer program but they are nervous about it because they

don't know their computer very well. They'll call us back a couple weeks later, maybe with a question about something, and say, 'This is really great! I don't know my computer, but I know what to do with this program!'" says Knoener.

"A lot of people have tried other programs first. There are other good programs out there, but what works for you will depend on what kinds of horses you have, what your business is like—whether they are your horses or horses you are taking care of for other people—and what you need to track. Those things will be different if you have a breeding farm, a training stable, etc."

"A lot of people have been really happy with ours because it is affordable. One of the other programs that people really like is The Jockey Club system, but it costs about $2,000. Some of their reporting features may be a little more powerful, and a person can check out their website (www.tjcis.com) for more information about it. There are other programs out there also, including some that were originally for cattle records and adapted for horse use, but these don't always fit your purpose (most horsemen are not buying silage by the ton, for instance). I just thought it would be nice to have something geared more toward horse people," she says.

"The reason this program came about was that my boss and her husband raise Standardbreds here on the farm, and went looking for a software program that would track everything for them. They weren't happy with anything they found, so they made their own. Then they realized that if other horsemen were having the same problem finding something to suit them, they could probably sell this program to other horse owners. It was developed by horse people for horse people, so it will cover the categories you'd most likely need on your computer, if you have horses," she says.

It is already set up with all the different categories and you merely need to plug in your own information that you want to keep track of. "Equifacts also has an area where you can put in farm expenses, which don't tie to any of the horse expense. You can keep those records completely separate if you wish. So if you buy 50 bales of hay and are boarding horses, and want to charge them separately for the feed but want to know how much you paid for the hay, you can put that under the section for farm expenses. Or if you bought a new manure spreader or a bunch of water tanks for the pastures, that's the area where you can enter those, and it's not tied to any of the horses," she explains.

If a person experiences problems installing or running the software, the company provides free technical support (by phone or e-mail) during regular business hours for the first 90 days. The user manual gives advice on things to try before calling technical support, with a troubleshooting guide, and tells how to perform a "cold reboot," since the majority of routine problems can be resolved in that manner.

Koener says that there are software programs on the market to fit nearly every horse business and if you check around a bit, you will probably find something that will work well for your particular situation.

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