

Banding Together



From the Executive Corner

by DOUG BURGE

This past month, I, along with our partners from Barretts Equine Limited, traveled over 2,000 miles visiting various farms and inspecting yearlings throughout the state. For the past 13 years, I have always looked forward to this annual trek. The face-to-face discussions and input from those investing in the production of Thoroughbreds is extremely important and vital to the strength of this association.

With the uncertainties that racing currently faces and the ever increasing cost of raising and owning horses, it is as important as ever to band together to improve the economics of this business.

I remember when I first started with the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA) in the mid-1990's; at that time the foal crop was at an all-time low, the stallion population was very questionable and the market for a California-bred was dismal. To combat these issues we made the legislative and policy changes necessary to strengthen the incentive awards and racing opportunities that fueled the demand for a Cal-bred. For roughly 10 years, we witnessed an annual increase in the number of mares bred, live foals, California stallions in the national listings, record number of graded stakes winning Cal-breds and a revitalized commercial marketplace.

The past few years have yielded different results. The quality continues to improve, however the number of mares bred and investment in new/young sires has declined sharply. The stagnant purse revenues, coupled with the ever-increasing costs at the farms and on the race track, has made it very difficult for breeders and forced many to down size. This focus on quality is obviously very important, although we also need to continue to produce the optimum number of horses to provide the needed inventory at the tracks. As I have stated on numerous occasions, our focus is on breeding more, and higher quality, horses.

With that said, we are once again working toward improving the economics to strengthen the demand for a Cal-bred. Unfortunately, all the past few years' industry efforts aimed at increasing the revenue stream for the horsemen have been stalled both by the state and the tribes; whether it is alter-

nate forms of gaming, instant horse racing machines or mitigation funds in lieu of the tribal compacts.

While the industry continues to focus on increasing the revenues for horsemen, the CTBA is also working toward assisting with reducing the costs currently facing the farms. Specifically, we have secured MOC (Maroevich, O'Shea & Coghlan) Insurance Services and the Zenith Insurance Company to provide competitive workers' compensation coverage to CTBA-member farms. MOC created the highly successful racing stable workers' compensation program that has resulted in a major reduction in trainer rates.

The goal of this group program is to provide a similar significant reduction to the rates at the breeding farms. Information on the program has been mailed to the membership. For further details, contact MOC's John Unick at (415) 957-0600.

Regarding the open discussions with members that I mentioned above, in mid-June, the CTBA Board of Directors co-hosted an event with the Santa Ynez Valley Thoroughbred Association (SYVTA) at the Alisal Guest Ranch & Resort in Solvang. This informal gathering was very well attended and provided an arena for individual discussions between the area breeders and the CTBA (see photo).

We are planning more of these events throughout the state, and will coordinate with each regional group. Now, more than ever, we need to keep the lines of communication open and work jointly to better the environment for those breeding and racing in California. 🐾



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