



Proving ground

Timberlane Horse Farm owner Dick Richardson and two other trainers give horses a few runs around the track to keep them in shape and to prepare them for the upcoming races that begin in the spring.

Hoke County is developing as a fine horse raising and training area

By Sherry Matthews

Although Hoke County is moving into a high tech age with expansions at Burlington and Faberge, there is at least one little known industry in the area that relies on good weather and lots of outdoor activity.

Horse raising, a popular industry throughout the country, has crept into the Hoke area over the last six years.

Four large stables are already breeding, training, breaking and raising thoroughbreds, harness horses and quarter horses in the county, and construction is nearing completion on a fifth major equine operation.

Timberlane, Entremont, Becky's Quarter horses and two other farms encircle the county.

"There has been a good bit of horse raising cropping up in the county," Agriculture Extension Agent Richard Melton said.

"It seems to keep growing every year," he added.

According to Melton, Hoke's "good climate" and sandy soil

have attracted horse farmers to the Hoke area.

"They really seem to like what we have to offer," Melton said.

"We have been very successful since we moved to Hoke County," Entremont manager and trainer Jerry Lepre said.

"There are a lot of benefits to raising horses in this area," he added.

"The land is relatively inexpensive, and it offers a good seasonal climate," Lepre said.

Entremont, which established itself in Hoke nearly six years ago, breaks, trains and raises thoroughbred race horses.

"We get them ready for racing here," Lepre said.

At present, Entremont stables 25-30 horses, but has the capacity to hold 40.

"We have an average of about 26 or 27 horses at one time," Lepre said.

Lepre and the other trainers work from September to May each year buying, training, racing and re-selling horses.

"There is a great deal of money involved with this type of operation," Lepre said.

"We had a horse that we sold for over a million dollars. That horse has already made \$650,000 in purse earnings," he added.

"That is something we are proud of," Lepre said.

At Timberlane, a harness horse farm, the grooms, trainers and owners are also proud of their work and accomplishments.

Timberlane opened up its stables in Hoke County three years ago and presently has 15 horses training at the farm and four others racing in New York.

"This has been a low year for us financially. We have cut back on the number of horses," Timberlane groom Allie Osgood said.

According to Osgood, Timberlane usually houses 25 to 30 "standardbreds."

"This is mainly a training facility," Osgood said.

At Timberlane horses are trained for six months and then sent to the race tracks.

"We usually work from September to April, send them to the tracks and then start back up again in September," groom Wendy Nist said.

"It is a continuous process, but it is lots of fun and hard work," she added.

Horses that train at the Timberlane farm come from Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky, New York and New Jersey.

"We buy some horses to train and race. Some we just train for other people," Osgood said.

Although the grooms and trainers begin their day at 7:30 with early morning stall cleanings, feedings, brushings and a four-mile run with the horses, both women say the work "is worth it."

"We have about 90% good luck with our horses," Nist said.

"You can't explain the feeling you get when you stand in the winner's circle with a horse you have trained," Osgood said.

"It is like watching your child take a first step," she added.

Besides "the good atmosphere" that Hoke County provides, both Osgood and Nist believe horse raising has moved into the area for "many reasons."

"Look at all the possibilities," Nist said.

"The people are nice, the weather is seasonal and the horses seem to love it," she added.

"There is no drastic change in the weather here. The horses are less likely to catch viruses in this type of weather," Osgood said.

"Besides, the horses seem to be much healthier here," she added.

In addition to the racing horses that are trained on Hoke soil, some "show horses" are also bred and prepared for contest in the area.

Becky's Quarter Horses, just north of Raeford, raises show horses and according to owner Larry Williams has produced "many first place winners."

"This is good horse country," Williams said.

"We had a horse that we sold for over a million dollars. That horse has already made \$650,000 in purse earnings."

--Entremont Manager Jerry Lepre

"You can see that if you count the number of farms that have moved into the area over the last few years," he added.

Williams and his wife Becky raise, train, show and sell quarterhorses.

They have horses in their stables from North and South Carolina and Michigan.

Just recently William's horses took two first place and two second place awards at showings in South Carolina.

"It is a real good feeling when people appreciate the work you have done," Williams said.

Like the others, Williams believes the good soil and seasonal climate are "just right" for horse training.

Williams also believes that the horse industry in Hoke County will build up the area's economy.

"We pay taxes on these horses and a lot of them are worth a good bit of money," Williams said.

"The county benefits from the horse farms," he added.

"I think we will see more and more springing up. That does not bother me...it just helps the business and the county," Williams said.

What will be the county's largest stabling operation is nearing completion off of Highway 211 near Timberland.

Although the owner could not be contacted for comment, the farm will apparently be used for raising thoroughbred race horses.

Stables at the facility will house 67 horses who will train on an almost one-mile race track. Construction is expected to be completed this spring.

Hoke Chamber of Commerce Director Earl Fowler says he sees the horse industry in this county as an opportunity to bring in more support industries.

"We are in the beginning stages of exploring those possibilities," he added.

According to Fowler, businesses that sell or produce horse feed, harnesses, bridles, shoes and other horse accessories would be welcome in the county.

"Horse raising has been good to this area. I think it is going to grow and bring in more income for the county," Fowler said.

"There is great potential for Hoke to be another big thoroughbred area," Melton said.

"It could be a boost for this area," he added.



Shoe fittings

These trainers are preparing one of Timberlane's young trotters for a day out on the track by fitting his hoofs with shoes. This is one of the many jobs that horse trainers and grooms do to keep their animals ready for the upcoming races.



Ready for thoroughbreds

This almost mile oval is nearing completion on a new thoroughbred raising and training stable coming to Hoke County. The multi-million dollar

operation is moving here from Moore County and will house 67 horses. The facility is expected to be completed by mid-spring.