



Resources for Sonoma County Horse Owners

Even with the best of intentions, horse owners sometimes find themselves in a situation where they own a horse that becomes a burden. Unfortunately, there are many unwanted horses in Sonoma County, making it difficult to find even the most desirable ones a suitable home. This will help you assess your options and create a game plan for your individual situation.

CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS

- Find a New Home for your Horse
- Keep Your Horse
- Get Assistance from a Horse Rescue
- Surrender Your Horse to Sonoma County Animal Control
- Auction
- Euthanasia, or “Putting to Sleep”

ASSESS YOUR SITUATION

- Do you want to keep your horse but need assistance doing so?
- Do you want to find a new home for your horse?
- Are you unable to find a new home for your horse?

ASSESS YOUR HORSE

- How old is your horse?
- Is your horse healthy?
- Is your horse physically sound and desirable as a riding horse?
- Would your horse be most suited to retirement?

FIND YOUR HORSE A NEW HOME

If you’ve decided you’d like to try to find your horse a new home, there are many ways to let people know that you have a horse available. Think of this as “marketing” your horse to find the best possible home. To start, make a list of particulars about your horse, including:

- Breed
- Age
- Height
- Color
- Training
- Temperament
- Health
- Level of Soundness, i.e., companion horse only, riding horse, light riding horse, etc.

HOW TO LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOUR HORSE

- Bayequest.com is a Bay Area Equestrian classified website. Text-only ads are free.
- Dreamhorse.com is a national horse classifieds website. Text-only ads are free.
- Craigslist.com is a local classifieds website. Ads with text and photos are free.
- Send out an email. Put together an email with information and photos of your horse and send it out to friends, asking them to forward your email in order to spread the word.
- Press Democrat classified newspaper ad
- Make flyers and put them up on bulletin boards at feed, tack and other horse supply businesses.
- Network locally (4H, Pony Club, riding schools, trainers, people looking for a companion horse)

CAUTION! SCREEN PROSPECTIVE HOMES

Horse slaughter dealers are common in Sonoma County. They look for free or low-cost horses given away by owners who don't ask questions. Horses who are sold for slaughter must endure a grueling long journey in a crowded trailer to either Mexico or Canada only to face a frightening, inhumane death in a slaughterhouse. Slaughter dealers often look for heavier breeds, such as quarter horses or draft horses, but in general, they do not discriminate. They will take any horse, even your kind, trusty old steed.

Another danger to Sonoma County horses are individuals who purchase horses to be used for cruel and illegal underground Charro rodeo events such as "horse tripping," where a horse is run loose at high speed, only to be roped and violently tripped. These individuals often target "hotter" breeds, such as Arabians or Thoroughbred, although they'll use any horse. Horse tripping leaves horses with broken bones, fractured teeth and jaws, and deep rope burns. Horses that survive the first tripping are placed back in the line-up to be tripped again and again. By the end of a rodeo season, few horses are left alive, and the ones that are have crippling injuries and a deep fear of people. The people who abuse these horses then dump them with slaughter dealers or abandon them on a remote property to die.

Screen prospective homes:

- Have they owned horses before, and what do they intend to do with your horse?
- Visit the property they intend to keep your horse at. Is it clean, safe, and are there other horses for company?
- Is there quality hay and fresh water available?
- Are their other animals healthy and in good condition?
- Ask for three (3) references: Equine veterinarian, farrier, and one horse-knowledgeable friend. Look for a pattern of responsible horse ownership and regular care of prior equines.
- Listen to your gut instinct: If something feels "off" about the home, don't place the horse there.
- Sign an adoption or sale contract with the home. You can find free contracts at www.bayequest.com
- After placement, check up on your horse often.

GET ASSISTANCE FROM A HORSE RESCUE

Horse rescues are either non-profit 501(c)3 charities or are privately run. Rescues are overwhelmed with unwanted horses, so it can be challenging to find a reputable organization to take your horse. Be cautious, there are many disreputable individuals operating under the guise of a "rescue." Here are some established local non-profit organizations to get you started:

- Grace Foundation of Northern California, www.thegracefoundationofnorcal.org, 916-941-0800. The Grace Foundation can help in many ways, including owner surrender, financial assistance, and low-cost euthanasia.
- Sonoma Action for Equine Rescue (SAFER), www.saferhorse.org, 707-824-9543. SAFER will list your horse on their website. They also have a Hay Assistance Program to help owners with short-term feeding needs.
- NorCal Equine Rescue, www.norcalequinerescue.com, 530-282-5565. NER accepts owner surrenders and also offers free or low-cost euthanasia clinics.
- Thoroughbred Friends, www.tbfriends.com, 530-383-2120. TB Friends is a private rescue that specializes in Thoroughbreds, but also networks to find homes for horses of all breeds.
- Coins Helping Abandoned and Neglected Equines (CHANGE), www.sonomachangeprogram.com, 707-570-7040. CHANGE does not accept horses from the general public, but can provide you with advice and mentorship in keeping your horse or finding it a home.

SURRENDER YOUR HORSE TO SONOMA COUNTY ANIMAL CONTROL

- Sonoma County Animal Care & Control Division, www.theanimalshelter.org, 707-565-7100. SCACC is a municipal shelter, which means it is required to accept all owner surrenders of dogs, cats and other animals, regardless of origin. Despite this, SCACC has no permanent holding facility for housing surrendered horses.

AUCTION

Petaluma Livestock Auction Yard, 707-763-0893. Holds a livestock auction every Monday. Sending a horse to auction is not recommended, as the seller has no control over where the horse ends up. Sonoma County slaughter dealers frequent the Petaluma Auction and purchase horses to send to slaughter in Canada or Mexico. The trip to slaughter is a cruel end for your horse. Also, individuals who use horses for cruel, illegal Charro rodeo events, such as horse tripping, often purchase horses at auction.

EUTHANASIA, OR PUTTING YOUR HORSE TO SLEEP

The decision to euthanize a horse is not an easy one. Emergency situations requiring euthanasia include injuries and illness that leave the owner no choice but to end the horse's suffering. Non-emergency situations include terminal and or chronic illness or conditions, or the financial cost of treatment for an injury or illness. Economic, emotional, and space limitations can force an owner to consider euthanasia for a horse if a suitable home is not available. Other reasons to consider euthanasia are a horse that has become dangerous and unmanageable.

Consider giving your horse one last act of kindness in the comfort of familiar surroundings rather than subjecting him to an unknown fate. The term "euthanasia" is derived from Greek and literally means "good death." You have several options for pursuing a humane end for your horse:

A licensed veterinarian performs euthanasia by injecting the horse with an overdose of barbiturates, which causes a rapid and painless loss of consciousness. The horse collapses and stops breathing; within a few minutes, the heart also stops beating. Out of consideration for the horse, most veterinarians prefer to sedate the horse first, relaxing it in preparation for the final dose. A horse's owner may stand with the horse or designate a caring handler to step in. It is by far the most humane option for euthanasia available. See RESOURCES for information on local equine veterinary practices.

If you are unable to afford the cost of veterinarian euthanasia, NorCal Equine Rescue and The Grace Foundation of Northern California offer low-cost euthanasia assistance. See RESOURCES.

An experienced firearm handler can also euthanize a horse with a gunshot to the horse's forehead. This is considered by the University of California at Davis to be a humane option for euthanasia of a horse as long as a properly trained and equipped individual performs it. See RESOURCES for a local company that will perform humane firearm euthanasia of horses. Due to local ordinances regarding discharge of firearms, this option may not be available in all areas.

DISPOSAL OF THE HORSE'S BODY

Most horse carcasses are taken to rendering facilities for disposal. Al Kuck Livestock Removal Service will pick up your horse's body and transport it to a rendering facility. Fees vary according to area. 707-762-7688. Burial of large animals such as horses is generally not permitted.

RESOURCES

Firearm euthanasia and body disposal

Al Kuck, 707-762-7688. Mr. Kuck does not charge for firearm euthanasia if he is also transporting the carcass to rendering. This can be an important option if a horse's owner cannot afford the cost of a veterinarian's services.

Local Equine Veterinarians

Sonoma-Marin Veterinary Service, 707-763-1222

Artaurus Veterinary Clinic, 707-763-1972

Cotati Large Animal Hospital, 707-795-4356

Canyon Large Animal Clinic, 707-792-4335

Richard Perce, DVM, 707-837-8187

Jamie Kerr, DVM, 707-795-1701

Paul McEvoy, DVM, 707-578-1228

John Kaufman, DVM, 707-545-0737

Low Cost Euthanasia Assistance

Grace Foundation of Northern California, www.thegracefoundationofnorcal.org, 916-941-0800

NorCal Equine Rescue, www.norcalequinerescue.com, 530-282-5565

**Educational Materials Provided by
The Sonoma CHANGE Program
www.sonomachangeprogram.com
707-570-7040**