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>> “I just simply went and asked for that stuff,” she said. “It just seemed like it was never an option for Robertson County, and I just wanted to see how I could do it, if I could do it.

“It’s been really stressful, but overall I’m really proud of what it is now, compared to how it started out,” Johnson continued. “I think we have a really nice facility and it is run by state codes the way it is supposed to be run.”

### MORE THAN THEY BARGAINED FOR

For Investigator Shane Mitchell with the Division of Animal Health, calls on neglect have become more and more common, he said. Approximately 85 percent of his calls for cruelty or neglect are regarding equines. Between the failing economy and people’s misunderstanding of what is necessary to care for horses, many horses are falling into the neglected category.

“The economic situation is part of it,” said Madison County Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent Brandon Sears. “Before the economic downturn, folks could afford more feed. When times get tough, they have to make a decision about having to take care of other priorities or feed animals.”

“The biggest trouble we run into is people not necessarily meaning to neglect, but ... they don’t have the means to take care of them once they acquire them,” Mitchell said.

Mitchell and Sears pointed to the role the economy has played in potential livestock abuse/neglect. In recent years, the price of equines has dropped considerably, with horses being sold at stock yards for as little as \$10, Mitchell said. Unfortunately, the cheap price of purchase is significantly outweighed by the more expensive price of hay and feed to support the horse — a challenge for which some new purchasers aren’t prepared.

Sometimes when equine owners become overwhelmed with their responsibilities, they will just abandon the animal in the wild or on someone else’s property, DAH Investigator James McClendon said. He had one case where an individual tied a horse to a tree on someone else’s property and the next morning it was found dead.

“A lot can’t feed them. Some keep them, but can’t feed them,” he said. “They’ll tell you everything — that they’re feeding them and taking them to the vet, but they’re not. They’ll put hay in there while we’re there, even though we saw it empty when we arrived.”

Cattle neglect is a less-frequent issue, Sears said, because most of what we have in Kentucky are commercial cattlemen. It is in their best interest to make sure their animals are healthy because they are producing beef and that’s how they make their income. If they have malnourished cattle or mistreated animals, they’re not going to be productive, he said.

“Sometimes there is perceived animal cruelty from a nutrition side,” Sears said. “We get calls where people who live in neighborhoods that back up against a farm see a cow and think it is too skinny. But, cows go through phases where they get skinny and bulk up, especially if they have calves on them.”

However, there are still neglect issues that exist with cattle, often revolving around the age and abilities of the individuals who own the farms, Mitchell said. Mitchell and other Division of Animal Health investigators have been trained in body condition scoring to help them identify animals that may need help. They also teach these techniques to local law enforcement officers to help them identify animals that may be malnourished and neglected.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH THOMAS



◀ DAH investigators check the papers of those arriving at the state fairgrounds to enter their livestock into the fair. Checking for proper paperwork helps ensure no diseased animals enter the fairgrounds during the shows.