



EQUINE FACTS

What to Look for in a Horse Boarding Facility

Bulletin #1012

These guidelines refer to horses, but are also applicable to ponies, donkeys, mules, and other equidae. They are offered as the basis for constructive discussion and reasonable solutions.

Many times horse owners are unable to care for their horses at their own homes and need to board their animals at a boarding facility or stable. Not all stables are the same. The purpose of this fact sheet is to review some items that you should consider when selecting a facility to be sure that it suits your needs and financial situation.

All facilities are not created equal

Stables offer a variety of levels of service to their customers ranging from “full service” to “minimal service.” You need to find out specifically how the stable defines its level of service and what is included in its boarding fee. Some stables offer additional services at additional fees. Every stable is different in what it provides. Be sure you understand what the facility is providing and what you as the horse owner will be required to provide.

Boarding facilities use lease agreements to outline the specific services that they are willing to provide to their customers. Lease agreements will also

address what happens if you do not pay your boarding fee on time. The lease is the legal document that defines the boarding facility’s responsibilities and your responsibilities as the horse owner.

Plan to visit the stable over a weekend and meet some of the people already boarding their horses at the facility. How long have they been boarding there? What do they like most about the facility? What would they change about the facility?

Does the stable cater to both youth and adults or is it either youth only or adult only? Does the stable cater to a specific style of rider, such as English,

Be sure you understand what the facility is providing and what you as the horse owner will be required to provide.

Western, Hunter, Trail, Racing, Eventing, or Showing? Are stallions on the premises, and if so, are they well secured? Are geldings separated from mares? Does the facility provide stalls that will accommodate both mares and foals?



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Things to consider when choosing a stable

Stalls

Ask about the size, cleaning schedule, and air quality of indoor stalls.

Size

- How big are the regular stalls? A typical size is 12 X 12 feet, though ponies and small horses can be boarded in smaller stalls.
- How big are the foaling stalls? The typical size for a foaling stall is 12 X 16 feet.
- How big are the tie stalls? The typical size for a tie stall is 5 X 12 feet.

Stall management

- Who cleans the stalls: the horse owner or facility staff?
- How often are they cleaned? Are they cleaned once a day, twice a day, or more?
- Are shavings/sawdust included with the boarding fee? Is there a standard amount of bedding that the facility uses?

Stall environment

- Is hay or feed stored above the stalls, which can cause an excess of dust?

- Is the stall near an indoor arena, which can also be a confined, dusty environment?

Pasture access

There are several arrangements for pasture access – or there might not be pasture access at all.

- Do the horses spend all their time in the pasture? If so, the pasture must have some kind of shelter, which may be a three-sided shelter or occasional stalls.
- Do the horses spend most of their time in stalls, with daily turn-out into a paddock? In this case, there will be either individual paddocks or multi-horse paddocks.
- Are the horses kept in stalls only, i.e. in total confinement with no pasture? If this is the case, the stable may or may not exercise the horses for the owner.

Enclosures

You will need to know what the fences are made of and how large the enclosures are. For more information on fencing suitability, see *Guidelines for*



Horsekeeping in Maine (University of Maine Cooperative Extension bulletin #1011).

Fences

- Are fences in good repair?
- How many horse escapes have occurred in the past month?
- What are the fences made of? Possibilities include board (wooden or composite), woven wire, or high tensile (smooth) wire; or there might be an electric fence (smooth wire, poly wire, or poly web).
- Does the facility use barbed wire fencing? This is NOT a recommended fence material for horses.
- Does the facility use temporary plastic twine fencing? If so, is it used as dividers for the pasture or as the perimeter fence?

Size of enclosures

- How large are the paddocks?
- How large are the pastures?

Feed

Find out what the stable feeds the horses, how often they feed, and how they determine rations and costs. For more information on horse feeding practices, especially in relation to pasture conditions,



see *Pasture and Hay for Horses* (University of Maine Cooperative Extension bulletin #1006).

Feed type

- Is the feed hay only? What type of hay?
- Is it hay and grain?
- Do horses have access to salt?

Feeding policies

- Is feed included in the fee for boarding?
- How much feed is allotted to each horse?
- How many times a day does the stable feed?
- If the horse requires more than the stable's "normal ration" of feed, is there an extra charge?



Water system

Find out how the facility provides water for the horses, both in the stalls and out in the pastures.

In stalls

- Does the stable use automatic waterers in the stalls?
- Do they use buckets? How often are they filled?

In pastures

- Does the stable have automatic waterers in the pastures?
- Do they use buckets or a water trough? How often are they filled?
- Does the facility use a spring or pond for water? Horses should not get their water from a spring or pond unless there is a special area that has been developed by the Natural Resource Conservation Service so the animals don't pollute the water. However, even if the water itself is protected, horses with access to open water sources could become infected by the larval stages of a water-borne fluke that acts as a carrier for Potomac horse fever.

Winter water

- Does the stable provide access to warm drinking water in the winter to reduce the incidence of impaction colic?

Health care

You will want to know how the stable arranges for routine and emergency health care, and how they keep the stable free from disease.

Disease prevention

- Does the facility quarantine new arrivals?
- Do they require vaccinations or tests before a new horse can be brought into the facility, and if so, for which diseases?
- Does the facility check to see if customers have updated their horses' vaccinations with booster shots?

Diseases a facility may require tests/vaccinations for:

- Equine infectious anemia*
- Tetanus
- Rabies
- Equine influenza
- Equine herpes virus**
- Strangles
- Potomac horse fever
- Encephalitis—eastern, western, and/or Venezuelan
- West Nile virus

*This disease is diagnosed with the Coggins test.

**The "rhino" shot offers some protection from this virus.

Deworming

- Who does the deworming?
- What products does the facility provide?
- How often does the facility deworm?

Routine and emergency veterinary care

- Is there an item in the lease about how the facility will handle emergency care?
- Can the customer choose the veterinarian?
- Will the stable manager make arrangements for routine checkups and shot clinics?

Farrier service

- Does the stable use one farrier exclusively?
- Who makes arrangements for the farrier?
- Will the stable attend to the customer's horse when the farrier comes?



Security and insurance

Find out the stable's policies on keeping your horses and other property safe, and what provisions they make in case something should go wrong.

Security

- Who checks on the horses? Is it the facility owner, the manager, or an employee?
- How often do they check on the horses? Are the horses checked once a day, twice, or more?
- Is there a secure area for tack storage?
- Is there a video monitoring system?
- Are there streetlights around the barns?
- Are there specified opening and closing times for the facility that customers need to follow?
- Does the facility have a fire-detection system or sprinklers?

Insurance

- What kind of insurance do customers have to carry? The stable might require customers to have one or a combination of the following: accident, liability, loss of use, and/or mortality insurance.
- Does the stable carry any insurance on customers' horses?
- What kind(s) of insurance does the stable have on its facilities?



Other amenities

There are many other services that a stable might provide.

Riding trails

- Are the trails on public or private land?

Arena

- Is the arena outdoors or indoors? If it is outdoors, is it open or covered?
- Are there jumps?
- What type of footing is there in the arena? Possibilities might include sand, clay, sawdust, or rubber chips.

Hot walker

- Does the facility have a hot walker?

Wash rack

- Is the wash rack outdoors or indoors?

Training

- Does the facility provide any training for horses?
- Do they offer lessons for riders?

Winter care

- Does the facility provide winter blanketing?

Horse-related events

- Does the facility offer any events?
- Do they provide trailering to an event? Is there a trailering fee?



For more information

Swinker, Ann, Patricia M. Comerford, Marjorie R. Margentino, Nancy M. Kadwill, Lynn F. Kime, and Jayson K. Harper. "Boarding Horses." *Agriculture Alternatives*. College Park, PA: Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, 2004. <http://agalternatives.aers.psu.edu/livestock/horses/horses> (accessed June 21, 2007).

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Whittle, William and Crystal Smith. "2006 Horse Boarding Guide for the Northern Shenandoah Valley." *Farm Business Management Update*, December 2006/January 2007. Stanley, VA: Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2006. <http://www.ext.vt.edu/news/periodicals/fmu/2006-12/horseboarding.html> (accessed June 29, 2007).

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