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Abandoned horses, whose property? (/full-blog/2010/10/abandoned-horses-whose-property.html)

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In May 2008, Pat Dawson of Time.com wrote an article entitled "An Epidemic of Abandoned Horses." The problem discussed in this article is still around over two years later. According to Dawson, two main factors contribute to the rise in abandoned horses: "rising grain and gas prices" and "the closure of American slaughterhouses." Pat Dawson, *An Epidemic of Abandoned Horse*, TIME.COM, May 28, 2008, available at <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1809950,00.html>.

Volunteer horse rescue groups are attempting to alleviate the problem but the cost of caring for horses is too great for some to maintain. Carol Holmes, owner and operator of White Cloud Ranch in Malibu, California, spent roughly \$2,500 every three weeks on food alone after having 27 horses abandoned on her property. Stephanie Bertholdo, *Bad economy causing horses to be abandoned at an alarming level*, THOUSAND OAKS ACORN, January 7, 2010, available at [http://www.toacorn.com/news/2010-01-](http://www.toacorn.com/news/2010-01-07/Front_Page/Bad_economy_causing_horses_to_be_abandoned_at_an_a.html)

[07/Front_Page/Bad_economy_causing_horses_to_be_abandoned_at_an_a.html](http://www.toacorn.com/news/2010-01-07/Front_Page/Bad_economy_causing_horses_to_be_abandoned_at_an_a.html). Although the cost of keeping and caring for the horses is high, many of the horse rescue groups are weary of giving the horses away because of the possibility that the horses will then be sold to slaughterhouses outside of the U.S. *Id.*

Most recently in the news, two abandoned horses were rescued in a field in New Mexico. Lee Ross, *Two Abandoned Horses Rescued*, ABOJOURNAL.COM, October 1, 2010, available at <http://www.abqjournal.com/abqnews/abqnewsseeker-mainmenu-39/24307-two-abandoned-horses-rescued.html>. A local horse rescue organization, Walkin' N Circles Ranch, found the horses in an open field with no available water. *Id.* Eleanor, one of the horses, was unable to graze because she was missing teeth. *Id.* Walkin' N Circles Ranch, is currently nursing the two horses back to health. *Id.*

The question then becomes, who owns these horses and who is responsible for paying for them? According to Rachel McCart, an equine attorney, this is not always a simple question. Rachel McCart, *Abandoned Horses: Finders, Keepers?*, EQUINE LEGAL SOLUTIONS HORSE LAW BLOG (September 15, 2008) <http://www.equinelegalsolutions.com/2008/09/abandoned-horses-finders-keepers.html>. In most cases, you do not gain title to the horse regardless of if there is a boarder relationship or the horse simply ended up on your property and should contact local authorities to determine the appropriate action to take. *Id.* The answer to financial responsibility is more difficult. The caregiver might have a hard time getting reimbursed for care or may choose not to fight it because of the legal costs associated with such a battle. *Id.*

In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be definitive measures available for people to take who choose to care for abandoned horses.

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"In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be definitive measures available for people to take who choose to care for abandoned horses."

The Kentucky General Assembly just passed HB 251 this year to address this very issue:
<http://www.lrc.ky.gov/record/10rs/HB251.htm>.

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