



## **Horse buyers, sellers face new hurdles**

**By Emily Blake**

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For Florida equestrians, buying and selling horses may just become the biggest hurdle to jump.

A new rule, which establishes stricter records requirements for the horse trade and aims to prevent unfair trade practices within the industry, took effect July 2.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services established the new regulations in response to a bill signed into law by the state Legislature last July.

According to the FDACS press, all private horse sellers must provide buyers with a written bill of sale that includes:

The name, address and signature of the purchaser, the owner or their duly authorized agents.

The name of the horse, its sire and dam if known, its breed and registry status if known and its age if known.

The sale date and purchase price.

Any liens or encumbrances on the horse. Under the new rule, buyers also have the right to see any medical documents pertaining to the horse they are considering.

The new requirements were established by the horse industry itself, said Kerry Flack, assistant director of Marketing for the FDACS. The department met with owners, buyers, trainers and veterinarians and held two public meetings to ensure that the requirements reflect the concerns of the industry.

Flack said the new rule is "self-regulating." If a buyer learns that information was withheld or was inaccurate during a purchase, he or she can register a complaint to the FDACS. If the seller does not respond, the buyer can then take the complaint to court.

The process is meant to offer recourse to those who were unjustly treated in a sale.

"The purpose is primarily to prevent deceptive and unfair trade practices," she said.

The FDACS's No. 1 priority, she said, is ensuring the availability of accurate medical information.

The new rules hopefully will discourage sellers from embellishing their horses' information to make a larger profit.

"Often times, you think you're getting a healthy horse when in fact you've been cheated," Flack said.

Many local equestrians agree that requiring medical information is a step in the right direction.

“From the buyer’s perspective, you’re always going to want to know whether the horses are sound and whether they have been taken care of,” said Jean Chance, owner of Cedarfields Farm in Alachua.

The new rule, she believes, is a surefire way not only to ensure that the buyer is getting a fair deal but also to prevent horse abuse.

“It’s always about the safety and health of the horse,” she said.

Chance, who sells purebred Arabian horses, doesn’t expect her sales to be affected by the new requirements.

Potential buyers ask her for the horses’ medical information already, she said. And because her horses are registered with the Arabian Horse Association, providing buyers with information is not difficult.

But some horse owners aren’t as lucky.

“A lot of this stuff is not that easy to track,” said Greta Wrigley, owner of Greta Wrigley Training in Alachua.

Wrigley, who has been in the horse business for about 35 years, said that finding medical records and other information for breed-registered horses is easy, such as records for Arabians and many thoroughbreds. The heritage of her registered Arabian horses, for example, can be traced “all the way back to the desert.”

But for owners of non-registered horses, getting background information is not so simple.

“As horses pass through various hands, some of that information may not be available,” she said.

Wrigley fears that horse owners who do not have access to medical information will make it up in order to comply with the new law.

Flack said the FDACS does not have the resources to verify that the medical records are indeed valid.

“They’re requiring something that they can’t enforce,” Wrigley said.