

Partnership shows promise for the sport horse sector

Declan McArdle,
Equine Specialist, Teagasc Rural
Economy Development Programme

It's that time of year again, preparing for the arrival of this year's foals. In finalising decisions regarding choice of sires to produce next year's foals it is important to look at the requirements of the market place and how as a breeder one can:

- Meet market demands
- Gain financial reward

To meet market requirements one must first understand the needs of the potential customer in the market you are breeding for.

Target market

There are many markets for sport horses. Showjumping and eventing tend to be the most lucrative markets. Whichever market you are targeting it is imperative to aim for the top. For example in the context of show jumping the 1m60 performer is the pinnacle.

This horse must have good conformation, technique, scope and a balanced canter in order to deal with the technicalities of modern day 1m60 tracks along with being competitive against the clock.

Likewise, an event horse breeder must consider the demands of a 4* horse requiring four good paces, conformation, technique, scope, brave cross country and with enough stamina to complete the course.

Breeders must constantly keep in touch with the sport to enable more informed decisions in the breeding enterprise

The product

In order to produce a product fit for purpose the key lies primarily with the mare and the attributes she brings to the table.

Questions to be asked:

- Does your mare have a performance rich dam line appropriate to your chosen market?
- Has she performed well and at what level?
- Has she good conformation and athleticism traits?

If your answers to the above are positive, the next step is to select a sire to complement your mare.

The true test of a sire is the results of his progeny. It is important, if possible, to go and see progeny competing in the flesh and make an appraisal.

Costs of production

It's important to keep in mind the po-



tential financial returns from breeding. I estimate the average cost of producing a foal to be approximately €1,650 plus stud fee.

Approximately 27% of horses are sold through the auction houses namely Cavan Equestrian Centre and Goresbridge Horse Sales.

The results of these sales are not a complete representation of the industry, however, we can learn some important points from them about the current climate.

From Charts 1 and 2, it is clear that the elite sales are significantly improving the returns to breeders whose stock are selected for this avenue of marketing and sale.

The trend shows that if you breed what the market requires it will reward you.

Tables 1 and 2 strongly suggest that the majority of breeders who are in the average bracket of the sales returns are losing money when you exclude the elite sales results and take stud fee and estimated costs of production into account.

One of the key factors which influence breeding enterprises is finance. Many breeders want to breed for the market place but cannot afford to buy a mare with a strong dam line for their chosen market.

This issue was addressed at the re-

Table 1:

Foals	Average not including elite	Average of elite	Average including elite	Top 20%
2016	€2,076	€9,627	€2,918	€8,027
-Costs	€1651 + stud fee	€1651 + stud fee	€1651 + stud fee	€1651 + stud fee
Total Profit	€425 (-Stud Fee*)	€7,976 (-Stud Fee*)	€1267 (-Stud Fee*)	€6,376 (-Stud Fee*)

*Plus any additional costs that may have been incurred

Table 2:

Three year olds	Average not including elite sales	Average of elite sales	Average including elite sales	Top 20%
2016	€3,176	€11,842	€4,700	€12,529
-costs**	-€3,440	-€3,440	-€3,440	-€3,440
Total Profit	-€264 (-stud fee*)	€8,402 (- stud fee*)	€1260 (-stud fee*)	€9,089 (- stud fee*)

*plus any additional costs that may have been incurred

** not including stud fee

ENNISNAG STUD BACKGROUND

Andrew developed his mare herd by purchasing filly foals with strong dam lines (1.60m performance in the first three dams), sound, and have blood (athletic with quick reflexes).

Andrew recycles the bottom 10% of his mare herd every year while ensuring he retains his best fillies. He is constantly researching the marketplace by watching shows online, attending stallion inspections in Europe and watching progeny of up-and-coming sires.

Andrew regards the market as good for elite foals, however, he feels the six/seven/eight year old market is the most profitable.

To enable him retain ownership and afford to produce his horses under saddle Andrew selects riders best suited to his horses and offers them half-shares in return for the production of the horses.

"For me to put 10 – 12 horses into training is financially prohibitive so what I do is rear the horses to three to four years of age, select the riders I think best suit my horses and then invite the riders to view them. If a rider agrees to take a half share of a horse in order to produce him it validates my decision to produce the horse through to competition.

"The benefits are that my horses get produced correctly and achieve their true value and it adds value to the family coming on behind."

cent Teagasc National Equine Conference, 'Opportunities to Grasp', which was held in Kilkenny last November. Partnerships were a key theme throughout the day with the majority of speakers recommending breeders combining forces to produce horses which meet market demands.

Examples discussed were:

- Breeder and breeder working together
- Breeder and rider working together
- Breeders utilising their mares (if the mare wasn't producing what the market required) as recipients for embryo transfer

Ennisnag Stud

Andrew Hughes of Ennisnag Stud who spoke at the conference promotes the concept of partnerships.

Andrew has grown his herd from a single mare to 20 over the last 12 years. The fruits of his labour are now being realised. Andrew had three horses competing in the finals of World Young Horse Championships in Lanaken last September.

For the majority of breeders this would not be financially possible. However, Andrew has entered partnership with a number of riders which enables him to bring these horses further along the supply chain, reaping a higher reward.

Chart 1

Analysis of foal sales

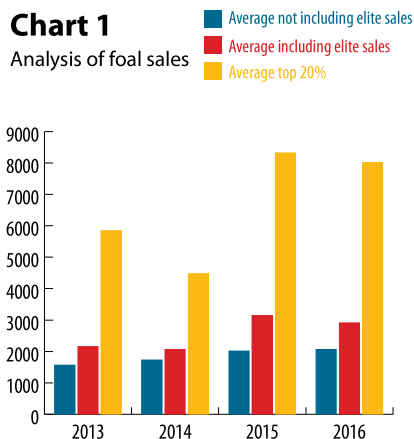
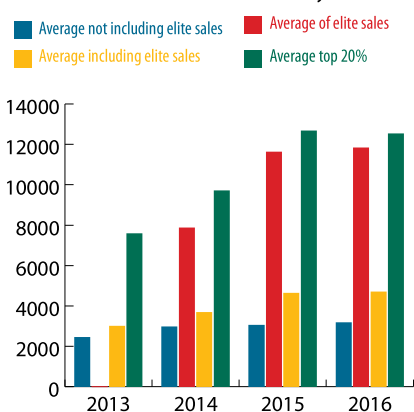


Chart 2

Overview of sales results for three-year-olds



IN CONCLUSION

As evidenced by the sales results there is financial reward for those who breed stock which meet market demands.

In future it may be more beneficial for breeders to combine forces and work collaboratively with other breeders/riders to achieve their goals and get financial return for their endeavours.