



op/ed

by Adam Corndorf

IN SUPPORT OF A MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE

I have been a member of the Kentucky Thoroughbred Association & Kentucky Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders (KTA/KTOB) for several years. I believe in supporting the entities that work tirelessly to improve our industry, and am confident that this organization has done a great deal for all of us who work with Thoroughbreds. However, I was disappointed to receive the following email from the KTA/KTOB on March 4, 2014:

"If you oppose HB 1 (minimum wage increase) the ability to take action is easy by using the link below. Many of our labor force already receives wages higher than minimum. Minimum wages are generally used for entry level workers that once they show their ability to do the work advance in wages. Should the minimum wage increase so MUST the wages for those already above that level. They will demand it in the name of fairness. The KTOB is one of 21 Associations opposing HB 1."

As an employer and member of the Thoroughbred industry, I strongly disagree with the KTA/KTOB's position on the minimum wage issue.

The KTA/KTOB states that "Many of our labor force already receives wages higher than minimum." While that may be true, those wages are barely higher than the minimum wage of \$7.25 (a wage that has not been increased since 2009, despite inflation and other cost of living increases).

The respected accounting firm Dean Dorton Allen Ford PLLC produces anonymous surveys of the equine industry. In its 2012 Equine Industry Survey Compensation Focus, it lists the hourly compensation for farm workers of different types. For the hourly pay of grooms, watchmen, agricultural workers, and seasonal agricultural workers, 123 of the 205 responses indicated that these workers are paid between \$7.25 and \$9.24/hour. This means that 60% of these workers, if working a typical six-day, 48-hour work week, earn a yearly pre-tax salary of between \$18,096 and \$23,063. I acknowledge that the respondents in this survey are merely a subset of the industry, but I see no reason to believe that this data is not reasonably representative of the industry as a whole. Raising a family with an annual income at this level would be challenging to say the least.

Furthermore, I am troubled by the suggestion by the KTA/KTOB that we should not increase the pay of our lowest earners to a livable wage because of the threat that higher paid employees would demand to be paid more out of fairness.

All employees deserve to be treated (and paid) fairly, regardless of the impact of those higher up on the totem pole. The suggestion appears to be that the industry will be strong when the few are able to prosper at the expense of the many. I respectfully disagree. I believe that raising the minimum wage, a suggestion supported by 73% of Americans according to a Jan. 19, 2014 Pew Research Poll, will create a stronger and more dedicated workforce, and will improve the industry as a whole.

Many of our industry's hardest-working, most reliable, and most indispensable employees are low-wage earners struggling with poverty. It pains me to learn that the organizations that exist to represent our industry and its stakeholders would oppose even modest attempts to improve the quality of life for those who need it most. I, of course, respect those who take an alternative viewpoint. And if the majority of the KTA/KTOB's membership opposes this measure, then it is justified in taking this position. But I want the most vulnerable members of the Thoroughbred industry to know that while the KTA/KTOB and other organizations may not support an increase to the minimum wage, there are some of us out there who do. ***Share this story. Adam Corndorf is the Vice President and General Manager of Blue Heaven Farm, a Thoroughbred racing and breeding operation based in Versailles, KY. Comments for publication? Email the TDN at suefinley@thetdn.com.***