

No Land...No Trails...

No Land…No Trails… Where will you ride tomorrow?By Carolyn L. Orr, Ph.D., Equestrian Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) 4037 Iron Works Pike, Suite 120, Lexington, KY 40511 (859) 455-8383 * corr@elcr.org

Rural areas with open space are experiencing unprecedented growth. Urban residents are choosing to build homes in rural areas to enjoy the perceived benefits provided by fields, forests and mountains. As more people move to the scenic countryside, the open space that attracts these new residents is increasingly at risk.

Undeveloped land provides clean water, wood and agricultural products, and is absolutely essential to all equestrian activities. Over the last two decades, the U.S. has lost 6,000 acres per day, or 250 acres per hour; 4 acres per minute of open space. Unless this trend is slowed, there will be nowhere to raise the hay and grain horses require, no pasture for horses and nowhere to ride. It’s time to start shouting the message from the roofs of stables and the center of riding rings all around the country. “Land use and land conservation are the most important issues facing horse owners of the 21st century,” says John Strassburger, former editor of the Chronicle of the Horse. “If you have ridden or owned a horse for more than a decade, you can think of places that you used to ride that have been transformed into houses or malls, barns that have closed as suburbia surrounded them, competitions that were forced to move because their showgrounds were sold, or foxhunts that kept moving their territory farther and farther away.” So what can you do? Your concern is the start. The single biggest thing anyone who owns land can do is to donate a permanent conservation easement on it. A conservation easement is a contract that limits the use of the land, forever. In exchange for giving up development rights, landowners can take significant reductions in real-estate and income taxes. Not everyone can donate an easement, but you can become a member of, and volunteer for, organizations that are working hard to preserve the countryside.The Equestrian Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) is the only national organization dedicated to saving equestrian land. ELCR is celebrating its 10th anniversary, and your recognition of the fight to save land for horses would be a great present. www.elcr.org