

20th-century establishment as horse capital

The first [thoroughbred horse](#) farm in Florida was developed in 1943 by [Carl G. Rose](#), who had come to Florida in 1916 from Indiana to oversee construction of the first asphalt road in the state. When he ran into problems with asphalt, he improvised and experimented with [limestone](#), an abundant resource in the state which he realized supported good pasture for raising strong horses (limestone nurtures Kentucky's [Bluegrass Region](#), long a center of thoroughbred horse farms). In 1943, Rose bought land along State Highway 200, at \$10 per acre, which became Rosemere Farm. The next year one of his horses, Gornil, won at Miami's Tropical Park, becoming the first Florida-raised thoroughbred to win a Florida race.

Close on Rose's heels, entrepreneur Bonnie Heath set up his own thoroughbred farm, producing the state's first winner of the [Kentucky Derby](#), [Needles](#) (see further below). Bonnie Heath Farm is now owned and operated by Bonnie Heath III and his wife Kim. Rosemere Farm was sold long ago, the large site redeveloped with retail center [Paddock Mall](#) and the [College of Central Florida](#).

In 1956, the Ocala-area [Thoroughbred](#) industry received a boost when [Needles](#) became the first Florida-bred to win the [Kentucky Derby](#). In 1978, Marion County-bred-and-raised [Affirmed](#) won the [Triple Crown](#). Today, Marion County is a major world thoroughbred center with over 1200 horse farms, including about 900 thoroughbred farms, totaling some 77,000 acres (310 km²). Ocala is well known as a "horse capital of the world."^[9]

Ocala is one of only five cities (four in the US and one in France) permitted under [Chamber of Commerce](#) guidelines to use this title, based on annual revenue produced by the horse industry. 44,000 jobs are sustained by breeding, training, and related support of the equine industry, which generates over \$2.2 billion in annual revenue. "Postime Farms" and Ocala serve as host to one of the largest horse shows in the country: H.I.T.S or "Horses in the Sun", a [Dressage/Jumper](#) event lasting about two months which generates some 6 to 7 million dollars for local Marion County economy each year. The show features classes for over 100 different breeds, including [Tennessee Walker](#), [Paso Fino](#), [Morgan horse](#), [SaddleBred](#), Draft horse and the [American Quarter Horse](#). Other equine events in the area include cowboy mounted shooting by the Florida Outlaws, as well as endurance rides, barrel races, "extreme" cowboy events, jumper shows, trick shows, parades, draft pulls, rodeo events and more.

