

# Comparing Lay-Up Costs: On the Track vs. At the Farm

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Owners who have been in the Thoroughbred business in California for many years may remember a more relaxed time, when there were longer breaks between our race meets. In fact, a look back at the last 50 years of historical race dates reveals that the total number of race days, both in Northern and Southern California, has steadily increased, from 378 days in 1959 to 552 total race days in 2008 – an increase of 46%.

In the past, owners often took advantage of the seasonal breaks to send their horses to the farm for short rests. A vacation for the horses could also mean a vacation for the checkbook. Times may have changed, but the same principal holds true today.

In fact, many trainers recommend that horses get some sort of “let down” time on the farm. According to Mike Mitchell, when a horse is ready for a break, “Even if the price was the same, you’d still want to get them off the track. It’s just better for the horse.”

*Owners’ Circle* did some research to compare current costs of laying up on the farm versus on the track, and the opportuni-

Year	So. Calif.	No. Calif.	Total
2008	270	282	552
1999	270	278	548
1989	298	317	615
1979	250	262	512
1969	226	245	471
1959	166	212	378

ties for owners to save money are more prevalent than many may realize. Farms in California charge drastically reduced day rates for horses who are simply taking a rest from the rigors of training at the track. We spoke with farms throughout the state and found that their day rates average just under \$22 per day. In order to keep the same horse in training at the track, you’ll be paying an average of \$76 per day (a bit less in the North).

One of the main reasons that farms can charge less is simply a matter of space. The ample space at most farms allows them to buy their feed in bulk, drastically reducing costs. On the other hand, storage space on the track is severely limited, leaving trainers unable to purchase more than a few days worth of feed at a time, ultimately paying for the added cost of storage and shipping.

One bale of Alfalfa on the track can cost a trainer as much as \$27. When purchased in bulk, that same bale can cost a farm as little as \$16. Additionally, many farms are able to buy and mix their own specialized grains by the ton, which is not only beneficial to the horse’s health, but also to the farm’s balance sheet. Costs for shoeing, vaccinations, x-rays, and bedding are also somewhat less at the farm level, as shown in the accompanying chart.

In difficult economic times, such as those being experienced by many Californians these days, it is more important than ever for the prudent horse owner to consider the pros and cons of giving his horses – and wallet – an occasional break from the racetrack.

AT THE TRACK AVERAGE COSTS		ON THE FARM AVERAGE COSTS	
<b>Feed</b>		<b>Feed</b>	
Sweet Feed (bag)	\$20.13	Sweet Feed (50lb)	\$14.70
Alfalfa (bale)	\$21.25	Alfalfa (110lb)	\$12.19
Oat (bale)	\$17.13	Oat (120-130lb)	\$9.00
Timothy (bale)	\$29.00	Timothy (110lbs)	\$15.33
<b>Bedding</b>		<b>Bedding</b>	
Straw (bale)	\$9.45	Straw	\$5.00
Shavings (bag)	\$8.80	Shavings	\$5.75
<b>Farrier</b>		<b>Farrier</b>	
Trim	\$78.00	Trim	\$36.50
Regular Shoes	\$137.00	Regular Shoes	\$105.00
Bar Shoes	\$225.00	Bar Shoes	N/A*
Glue-on Shoes	\$250-450	Glue-on Shoes	N/A*
<b>Veterinary</b>		<b>Veterinary</b>	
Vaccinations		Vaccinations	
Flu/Rhino	\$32.00	Flu/Rhino	\$25.00
West Nile	\$32.50	West Nile	\$24.67
Worming	\$27.50	Worming	\$12.00
X-Rays (per view)	\$37.50	X-Rays	\$22.50
<b>Day Rates</b>		<b>Day Rates</b>	
Full Training	\$75.63	Turnout Rate	\$21.80
Non-Training	\$57.50	Hospital/Stall Rate	\$28.25
Hospital	\$65.00	Light Training	\$25.00
Retirement	\$22.50	Breaking	\$42.50

\*not commonly used on the farm