

# Real Estate Market Report

## Why Horse Properties Are Hot

By Debbie Meighan

PHOTOS COURTESY: DEBBIE MEIGHAN



Horse properties priced under \$700,000 are the “unicorns” of the current real estate market. This 12-acre farm in Marshall, Va. sold immediately, with multiple offers.

As a real estate agent who specializes in equestrian and country properties in Loudoun, Fauquier, Prince William and Clarke Counties, it’s not unusual to be asked, “How’s the real estate market for a property like mine?”

In recent weeks, I’ve been asked the same question but with a much more concerned edge to it.

I’m here to tell you all, it’s going to be okay. In fact, it’s actually pretty great. Somewhat surprisingly, I have never been busier in my career than now. Let’s take a deeper dive into the reasons behind the strong real estate market in northern Virginia.

### Overall Strength of the Washington DC Economy

According to the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter report put out by the Dulles Area Association of Realtors (DAAR) our area’s economic fundamentals are strong.

“As we headed into 2020, Loudoun County and the broader Northern Virginia economy had been performing very well, with fast-paced job growth in 2019. Loudoun County is expected to add more than 6,000 jobs in 2019. Job growth in Loudoun County is broad-based, though the sectors with the fastest growth have included the Professional & Technical Services, Construction, and Educational Services sectors. Strong economic growth had been creating a very tight housing market in the DAAR. These strong fundamentals will help the region withstand the current economic downturn.”

What this means is that while we have taken a severe hit, our area is very resilient. Nowhere is this displayed more clearly than the sale of Newstead Farm in Upperville which closed in March 2020. Listed at \$10 million dollars, it was one of the Virginia countryside’s most expensive estates. A premiere equestrian facility and a mansion with a rich history, it was also a property with a very small pool of potential buyers. The buyers had also looked at farms in Kentucky, but Newstead won them over based, at least partially, on the strong economic foundation of the greater Washington DC area.

### Inventory and Interest Rates

The inventory of homes for sale in our area is critically low. For farm properties, the inventory shortage is even more so.

Another driving force for the strong market are very low interest rates for home loans. While government backed loans such as FHA and USDA loans have tightened up their requirements for lending, this has affected the sales of lower priced properties more so than horse properties.



Newstead Farm in Upperville, Va. is a landmark horse farm that sold this spring.

This was very apparent in my next example. When I saw 8616 Woodward Rd. in Marshall pop up on the market, I sent it to my first-time home buyer clients immediately and set up a showing for the next day. Twelve open and usable acres with fencing and a small horse barn was already in place. The house needed updating but was tidy and well cared for. Priced under \$600,000, I knew this was going to be a popular property. Boy, was I right. The seller was overwhelmed with showings and even with proper protection being worn, she was nervous. However, she ended up with multiple offers. My buyers wanted the property badly, so we put together the strongest offer we could and prevailed. Horse properties priced at \$700,000 and under are the unicorn properties of our area.

### Country Life is Desirable

Where once a large lawn was an objection to overcome in terms of cost and/or time for mowing it, its now a huge selling point. There’s plenty of room to walk around, play with the kids and let the dog(s) run around!

Realtors are seeing an influx of buyers heading west to the country to look at potential second homes or weekend homes. They are also looking for properties with in-law suites or guest houses and even better, a great pool. Our area has competed with beach homes for these buyers in the past, but there are a significant number of people



River House, on the Shenandoah River, offered its buyers 20 acres of seclusion, a desirable feature in today’s market.

who prefer the countryside over a crowded beach, or community pool. People realize that they would like a place to gather their family together—and they want the room to do that.

Our country properties and horse farms have never been in more demand. My listing, the River House, is a gorgeous home set on the Shenandoah River with 20 acres down a long gravel road. The buyers were from McLean and were delighted to have the house and all its contents.

The bottom line is that our country properties and horse farms are more desirable to buyers than they have ever been. If you have been thinking about selling but wasn’t sure it was the right time—it’s the right time. It may in fact be the best time.

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