

Because of the farmer's dependency on the mule, breeding became a lucrative industry in the United States during the time when equine power was king. In fact, there was considerable speculation in the market. Many unscrupulous dealers were accused of buying up old, worn-out animals, fattening them up and reselling them at high prices, since it was difficult for farmers to determine the animal's age. As a result, many farmers learned to buy only unbroken mules for fear of being cheated.

The prevalent farm animals of America during the 19th and 20th centuries, the mule population peaked in numbers in 1925. During that time there were over five million mules, concentrated heavily in the South. Most could be found on small one and two mule tenant farms where they served as draft and field animals.

There are believed to have been a half million mules in Georgia in 1930. In fact, during the 1930's and '40's, Atlanta had one of the largest mule markets in the country.

While a few small farmers continued to utilize mules in the 1950's, the 1960 Census of Agriculture considered them so few in number, they were not counted separately. Because farmers found it more convenient to turn a key, the mule soon was replaced by tractors and trucks in the field.

### What Makes a Mule

*Mules are one of nature's oddities. A true hybrid, the mule is a cross between a female horse and a male donkey (the opposite cross between a female donkey and stallion is known as a hinney). Because the mule inherits two numerically unmatched sets of chromosomes from its parents, it is sterile. A female mule is known as a "Molly" while a male is referred to as a "horse mule."*

*Each mule's characteristics depends upon the donkey and horse breeds which have been mated together. As a general rule, mules inherit the donkey's long ears, Roman nose, fine boned legs, small hooves and unmistakable Bray. The horse contributes the mule's height, coat and neckline.*

*Mule enthusiasts believe that it is the mule's hybrid vigor which gives it a durability which far exceeds a horse. The animals are known for their intelligence and longevity. Contrary to popular belief, the poor man's horse is not stubborn. A mule simply is smart enough not to do work which might be too hard for him or to endanger his life in any way.*