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In January 2016, a broad multi-stakeholder group led by FEEVA and World Horse Welfare released the **Guidelines to Assess Fitness for Transport of Equidae;** an essential practical resource for anyone involved in the transport process.
http://www.fve.org/uploads/publications/docs/final_fitness_for_transport_equidae_guidelines_2016.pdf

## Julie Girling's proposed Own Initiative Report on Responsible Equine Ownership[3]

In her draft Own Initiative Report Julie Girling Member of the European Parliament proposes such guidance for the equine sector, as well as other non-statutory suggestions to support better welfare in the equine sector.

Such guidance, adapted to meet the needs of all equines, translated, available in a variety of formats and promoted by the European Commission, could do much to enhance the knowledge of equine owners and handlers alike, and would safeguard not only the health and welfare of the individual animals, but their long term economic value and output too.

[3] The proposed Own Initiative Report should be available for discussion in the European Parliament mid 2016

## EHN and its Members

The EHN is a non-profit network composed of many equine organisations operating in Europe.

***EFTBA -*** *European Federation of Thoroughbred Breeders Associations,*

***FEI -*** *International Equestrian Federation,*

***EEF -*** *European Equestrian Federation,*

***EPMA -*** *European Pari Mutuel Association,*

***Hippolia -*** *Cluster and research Foundation*

***WBFSH –*** *World federation of Sport horses Breeders,*

***HNS -*** *Swedish Horse Council Foundation,*

***EMHF –*** *European and Mediterranean Horseracing Federation,*

***UET -*** *European Trotting Union,*

***WHW -*** *World Horse Welfare,*

***FECTU –*** *European Draught Horse Federation,*

***ESSA –*** *European State Studs Association,*

***CBC-BCP –*** *Belgian Horse Confederation,*

***Hippolis -*** *National Equine Competence Association of Finland,*

***FEIF –*** *Icelandic Horses,*

***FEEVA -*** *Federation of European Equine Veterinary Associations,*

***EEN -*** *European Educational Network,*

***ETF -*** *European Trainers Federation,*

***BETA -*** *Equestrian Trade Association,*

***IFCE –*** *French Equine Institute,*

***FITE*** *– International Equestrian Tourism Federation*

***FERPI*** *- Italian Equestrian Working Group*

# RESPONSIBLE EQUINE OWNERSHIP

A briefing by the European Horse Network March 2016

# Why is responsible ownership and horse welfare important to Europe?

Europe's equine sector generates more than €100 billion each year and supports almost a million jobs, making it the 2nd largest rural employer in some EU countries. Horses, being uniquely versatile, can move between different roles throughout their lives: from elite athlete to therapy animal, to draught or tourist animal to a source of food.
The welfare of many of Europe's horses is at an excellent level and for others it's in need of improvement.[1] The most commonly perceived problems are with the environments and ways in which equidae are kept.

The problems exist across all Member States. The keeping of equidae in unsuitable environments, ignorance of owners and concerns about neglect have been raised across Europe regarding equidae in any number of roles (sport, hobby, work, meat). Problems include:

- Environments with a lack of space
- Long periods of confinement without access to turnout, and environments which do not provide social interaction
- A lack of knowledge of proper equine care among equid owners
- Neglect (failing to meet basic needs such as the need for food and water)
- Poor transportation conditions particularly with horses for meat
- Difficult end of life conditions

[1] Research undertaken by World Horse Welfare and Eurogroup for Animals in the report Removing the Blinkers: The Health and Welfare of European Equidae in 2015, shows that despite the breadth of the sector, the welfare problems facing Europe's 7 million equidae are remarkably similar.

# Horses used in sport, tourism, for therapy, for meat or kept as a hobby should be bred and kept in a responsible way by knowledgeable owners and surrounded by professionals.

The treatment of working equidae is a particular cause of concern in a number of European Member States, especially on Semi Subsistence Farms (SSF). No data exists to accurately quantify the numbers of animals used on SSFs[2], however there are a reported 600,000 – 800,000 equidae present in Romania, around 80% of which are used for working activities, such as for the transportation of goods and people, and for agriculture and forestry work.

As many of these equines can live on easily available foodstuffs, such as grass and hay, they may be perceived as needing little in the way of specialist attention. This is unfortunate as welfare problems caused by inexpert amateur farriery or unsuitable harnesses do not simply cause pain and injury to the equid, but can also compromise the ability of the animal to work efficiently.

Many of the same problems are found where equines are used in tourism. In some instances, the welfare of the equid is seriously compromised by their work, which consequently impacts upon the efficient functioning of the enterprise. Common welfare issues identified with working equidae in tourism are:

- An unsuitable environment and lack of shelter from the sun
- Poorly fitting and designed harnesses, causing wounds
- A lack of adequate access to feed and water
- Overwork, for example by animals being made to carry inappropriately heavy loads
- Lack of veterinary supervision
- Poor hoofcare
- Poor stabling conditions
- Rough handling

[2] Two key criteria define SSF in Agriculture: a physical size under 2 hectares, and a standard output below €2,000. They sell less than 50% of total production, producing predominantly for personal household consumption. They are still pervasive in the EU despite structural change over time. They are typically family-run and often elderly. In an EU total of 12.1 million farms, 5.8 are classified as SSF/SF

# How do we improve that situation in Europe?

Given that equidae are ultimately food producing animals in EU law, in some ways equidae are broadly covered by a number of legislative acts pertaining to their health and welfare. However they are not well covered while playing the many other roles they can fulfil throughout their lives, as these do not fit easily into the categories of livestock or companion animals.
While better implementation and enforcement of existing laws would help remedy some welfare problems, particularly welfare in transport, it is not clear where added European legislation could, or should, add value to many of the problems outlined above. Instead, value could be added by tackling ignorance and by spreading best practice and guidance where possible.
Veterinarians and other professionals can act as guardians of welfare by educating owners to comply with existing laws and to implement good practices where laws are missing. This highly ethical role should never cease, neither in day-to-day management, nor in important milestones of their lives, such as identification and registration, change of ownership, health and welfare treatments, and end of life.

The horseracing sector is often a leader when promoting best practices and information across racing nations including establishing general guidance and standards for the care and safety of horses.
It is also worth noting the significant work by the International Group of Specialist Racing Veterinarians including their Welfare Guidelines for Horseracing http://www.igsrv.org/welfare
In France, a successful network has been set up which is called RESPE (www.respe.net). Alerts from more than 500 French Vet sentinels, from laboratories and corresponding vet members of Europe are circulated and increase the sanitary security. All the relevant information on health, training, breeding or racing are circulated to the breeders, trainers, owners, jockeys by mailings and the website. Similar surveillance networks exist in other countries, but more harmonised disease surveillance throughout Europe would be highly beneficial.

Governments, most particularly Ministries of Agriculture provide guidance on meeting the basic needs of equines from birth to the end of life. The UK guidance for instance outlines minimum practical standards for the keeping of equines under each of the 'five freedoms' – freedom from hunger or thirst; from discomfort; from pain, injury or disease; the freedom to express normal behaviour; and freedom from fear and distress. This guidance, produced by the equine sector, is both a support to overarching Animal Welfare legislation and educational in its own right.

## A further step in Animal Welfare in Europe has been adopted by the Member States on 15 February 2016

Establishment of an EU Animal Welfare Platform, "a valuable and useful tool in regards to more uniform and transparent legislation" …"contribute positively to the development towards higher standards of animal welfare based on scientific results and gained experience".

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/agrifish/2016/02/15/