



How the equine sector supports the European Commission's priorities for jobs, growth and investment

Members of the European Parliament discussed the economic potential and diversity of the equine sector on 3 June 2015 in Brussels.

Several new Members of Parliament joined the MEP Horse Group meeting at the European Parliament on 'Horses for Growth and the Environment' hosted by the European Horse Network (EHN) and chaired by Julie Girling (ECR, UK). A total of eight MEPs attended or were represented where the significant potential of the horse sector in today's society was debated.

Bo Helander, speaking on behalf of the Swedish Horse Council, presented a newly released Swedish report (Horse Sector 2020 – a development plan for growth), highlighting the potential of the equine sector to mitigate some key societal challenges posed by issues such as urbanization, unemployment, a lack of youth opportunities and mental stress. One finding showed that people with a background in horses, especially since childhood, were more likely to be employed in leading corporate positions, illustrating the role of the sector in leadership development.

Pit Schlechter, Chairman of the European Draft Horse Federation (FECTU), focused on how in contrast to Central and Eastern Europe, where the number of traditional working equids are declining, working horses are gaining new popularity over growing parts of Western Europe as a green alternative to diesel power, in managing forests, in maintaining landscape and in small farms especially in remote and in more mountainous areas. A growing body of research, together with a wide range of new machinery from Europe and the United States, supports the potential of working horses as a truly renewable source of energy; however a key challenge that remains is the poor profile of the working equid, with many Member States still viewing it as a backward form of power.

Ali Kucuk, General Secretary of the European Equestrian Federation (EEF), presented the latest data from the European horse sector collected through the EEF survey in 2014, where responses were received from 22 Member States in addition some other regional non-EU countries. The findings estimated that the EU equine sector generated an annual economic impact of €50billion, involved 1.9million riders and provided employment of 900,000 full-time equivalent jobs. The survey is carried out annually and will start to focus on the ratio of the sector's economic impact to each Member States' GDP, with a key aim being to monitor the trends across the sector going forward.

Jean-Paul Bérard provided an insight into equicoaching in France, where regional enterprise training budgets are used to support management training and teambuilding days. Geraldine Senterre and Valentine Leroux then presented on the expanding field of hippotherapy, where horses support the rehabilitation of people, from 2 years olds to adults, suffering from a wide range of mental and physical challenges.

Two key themes resonated across each of the wide ranging presentations; firstly the importance of data gathering to provide robust evidence on the contribution of the equine sector to today's European society and secondly the challenge of changing the profile of the horse sector, most notably emphasizing the extraordinary versatility of the horse.



Julie Girling concluded by highlighting the opportunity presented by the Own Initiative Report on rural jobs currently being undertaken by the Agri Committee, through inclusion of the potential of the equine sector in building the rural economy.