

Animal Welfare Strategy

The EU's Animal Welfare Strategy and Framework Law have the potential to improve the welfare of millions of European horses, ponies, donkeys, mules and hinnies, by dealing with key issues such as transportation to slaughter, overbreeding, disease and the general welfare requirements of these animals.

If the Animal Welfare Strategy and proposed Framework Law are to have a positive impact upon equine welfare in the EU, it is essential that they are based on and can accommodate future scientific research such as that reviewed by EFSA. Research and funds are needed to ensure that horse welfare legislation remains up to date: an aim which fits into the Horizon 2020 strategy, given that animal welfare is a concern shared by citizens across Europe, as demonstrated by the widespread support that animal welfare campaigns receive.

Good animal welfare cannot exist without good animal health since the two are inextricably linked. In light of this, it is clear that there should be a strong link between the Animal Health Strategy, the Animal Welfare Strategy and Framework Law. These policies should work to improve both animal welfare and animal health, as well as decrease the risk of the spread of animal disease. This would also reduce some of the potential negative impacts on human health.

Finally, if the goals of the strategy are to be achieved, funding needs to be made available for educational and communications based activity.



Horse Welfare

A horse crisis in Europe?

Horses and humans have evolved a unique partnership over many centuries, and to this day horses play an important role in society. This partnership is right as long as we take full responsibility for their welfare. Whether family pets, equine athletes, or used for leisure, agriculture, as transport or even as food, horses contribute to lives, cultures and economies across Europe.

The economic downturn has spared almost no one, and the impact on horses has been especially hard.

Keeping horses for any purpose is now a cost many cannot afford, and it is also becoming more difficult to find buyers for horses when owners are left with no choice but to sell. Horses at the lower end of the market are now virtually worthless in financial terms, putting them at increased risk of neglect or abuse or long-distance journeys to slaughter.

Horse welfare is integral to every aspect of the European horse industry; it is both important in its own right, and vital to ensuring good performance, maintaining biosecurity and the safety of the food chain. The European horse industry has an annual economic impact of €100 billion – which means that equine welfare should be an issue of interest for policy makers across the EU.



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Long-distance transportation to slaughter

It is currently estimated that up to 65,000 horses each year are transported long-distance across Europe to slaughter or for further fattening. The conditions in which the horses are transported and the unnecessarily long journeys, passing many slaughterhouses licensed to take horses, lead to severe welfare problems and pose an EU-wide disease threat. Currently there is no limit on the duration of these journeys, which can last for days covering thousands of kilometres. The vehicles used are often unsuitable for horses, with poor ventilation, slippery flooring and unsuitable partitions which cause injury, whilst the horses are left vulnerable to disease as their immune systems are compromised by dehydration, stress and exhaustion.

The charity World Horse Welfare is campaigning for an end to these cruel and needless journeys but is seeking no change to the current arrangements for the transport of registered horses. There is enormous support for change: last year more than a million EU citizens and the European Parliament called for an 8-hour limit on all journeys for slaughter. Moreover, scientific evidence shows and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) agrees that horses should travel for no longer than 12 hours when they are being transported to slaughter. Yet these journeys continue and a proposal from the Commission to implement this EFSA recommendation is still awaited.

World Horse Welfare has produced a Dossier of Evidence, setting out 14 key recommendations, including a maximum journey limit of 9 – 12 hours for all movements of horses intended for slaughter and of

commercial movement of non-registered horses, as well as other welfare improvements.

The charity is also calling for mandatory country of origin labelling for horse meat and products that contain horse meat, such as salami. Currently consumers may be misled by labels which deem the meat a product of the country where it was slaughtered (despite the animal having spent only a few hours there after a torturous journey lasting days). The full Dossier can be downloaded from www.worldhorsewelfare.org



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EU five point plan

In April the European Commission released a five-point action plan in the wake of the horse meat scandal. In it, they outline actions to be taken on food fraud, testing programmes, horse passports, official controls, implementation and penalties, and food labelling.

Mandatory country of origin labelling for meat, as foreseen in Regulation (EU) no 1169/2011 for swine, poultry, goats, and sheep, should be extended to horse meat – including products such as salami – as a matter of urgency. It is the right thing to do for consumers, and it will improve traceability if there are concerns relating to the meat product in question.

The equine identification Regulation ((EC) No 504/2008) must be robustly implemented and enforced across all Member States to ensure proper traceability. Inconsistent compliance with this legislation and a lack of enforcement increases the risk that horses may enter the food chain which should not do so: horses which have

been treated with drugs prohibited for use in food producing animals, or horses that have no passports – or incomplete or inaccurate passports – and therefore no record of any drugs with which they may have been treated during their lifetime.

Simple measures to improve passport standards like a single approved passport template incorporating embossing, lamination, stamps, and robust binding would make a huge difference to enforcement in line with the current international requirements for thoroughbred bloodstock and passports for competition animals. Central Equine Databases are also essential tools at the time of the issue of any passport, enforcement and as an essential tool to combat outbreaks of serious equine disease. We welcome the Commission's move towards making these compulsory in all Member States.

Sport

Europe is at the top of international horse sport, with all but two of the medals for equestrian events taken by European athletes at the London 2012 Olympics. Para-sport is also well represented, with European athletes at the top of the Paralympic equestrian medal table at London 2012. With world-class facilities and international events taking place every year, Europe has much to be proud of.

Horses' involvement in sport is just one of many facets of our unique and evolving partnership. The role of horses in sport is legitimate and right, as well as mutually beneficial - as long as their welfare is put first. When horses are used in sport, a heavy burden of responsibility for their welfare rests on the shoulders of those who own, train, ride and care for them. High value sport horses are generally exceptionally well cared for, thanks to the significant investment that flows into the industry and the vigilance of regulators. As a result, European equestrianism sets the example for the rest of the world by always striving to reach the highest possible standards of welfare and safety.

Europe can be proud of this attention to welfare, but everyone involved in the sports horse industry know that they can never be complacent. These high standards must be maintained and improved upon, and the benefits trickle down to all levels of horse ownership in Europe. The welfare of horses during transport is one of the most crucial aspects of this care.



Kit Houghton



World Horse Welfare



Courtesy of FEI



Courtesy of EHN



Courtesy of the Hästmärings Nationella Stifvelse



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