



**EQUINE CONFERENCE: *Responsible care throughout the life of equines***  
**16<sup>th</sup> October 2018 - European Parliament in Brussels**

**More than 70 people were present at the Equine Conference this year, co-organized by 4 European structures of the equine industry and hosted by MEPs Julie Girling and Jean Arthuis, Chair of the Horse Group of Parliament.**

The conference, bringing together professionals from all sectors - food and agriculture, veterinary sciences, equine welfare, law enforcement agencies, equestrian sport and horse racing, wanted to take stock of the actions and practices in the field for improving the welfare of European equines.

A year and a half after the adoption in the European Parliament of her own initiative report on the responsible ownership and care of equidae, Julie Girling wanted to question breeders, better understand the retirement or the second life of racehorses, to address clearly the sensitive issue of the end of life. Owning a horse is not easy, it is intense and expensive and some responsible actions must be taken from birth to the end of a horse's life.

**Des Leadon**, a veterinarian representing thoroughbred breeders in Europe, recalled the highly regulated way of breeding elite horses.

**Roly Owers**, Executive Director of World Horse Welfare, insisted that rescue and rehoming centres cannot accommodate all abandoned or mistreated horses and that breeding must be done responsibly, owners need to learn more, the value of the horse maintained to better manage the end of life.

**Di Arbuthnot** of IFAR, racing horses retraining organisation, says IFAR's work helps to improve the welfare of equids around the world, but we are far from knowing the number of racehorses that can access a second career, in sport, hippotherapy but all this is developing very quickly. The organisation can exist thanks to the contribution of the owners when entering each race.

**Pedro Matellán**, captain of the Guardia Civil within the specialized group SEPRONA for the fight against environmental crimes, recalled the operation Gazel in 2017, in coordination with Europol, which dismantled an illegal network in the horse meat trade in the European Union. Of the 65 people arrested, some were also behind the 2013 horse meat scandal.

**Pierre Naassens**, veterinarian representing the meat sector, examined the impact of exclusion from the food chain. About 50% of the 7 million horses in Europe are permanently excluded from the food chain by their owner. This has consequences for animal welfare, fraud and waste. The horse loses its residual value and professionals therefore ask European decision makers to take action against this exclusion for life.

**Birte Broberg**, from the Danish Ministry of Agriculture and Chair of the Equine Subgroup of the European Platform for Animal Welfare, chaired the second group of experts to present the practical guides available for transport, agriculture, slaughterhouses. These best practices should be widely disseminated and copied.

Ms Broberg reported on progress in the European Commission platform for animal welfare and the Equine Sub-group. This group is currently working on the production of the first guide on the care of horses and donkeys in the EU. A guide for horses will be presented at the next meeting of the platform

in November. It represents an opportunity for all stakeholders in the equine sector to refer and use the guide as a basis for daily work.

**Mette Uldahl** addressed end-of-life issues according to the FEEVA, the veterinary profession. Euthanasia is a professional act performed by veterinarians to protect horses against unnecessary suffering. It is to be considered a welfare act. To ensure proper governance of horse welfare the option of euthanasia should be secured.

**Nancy De Briyne**, from the Federation of European Veterinarians, returned to the Good Practice Guides for Improving Horse Transport, a project that was almost completed and funded by the European Commission. These guides, translated into 8 languages, cover the entire transport process, from loading to unloading. The guides help to facilitate the understanding and practical implementation of Regulation 1/2005 on the transport of animals in order to improve their welfare.

**Luc Mirabito**, Livestock Institute and **Adrien Carli**, Equine INTERBEV have published the first guidelines specifically designed to ensure good practice in slaughterhouses. This initiative has been put in place with a comprehensive scientific base and broad stakeholder consultation.

**Armelle Renard**, from the FNC, the equine branch of the French agricultural union, detailed the French Charter for Equine Professionals. 8 equine welfare measures have been developed. Signatory members of the Charter consider these measures as the most relevant to implement on the ground, to improve or maintain the level of welfare. A best practice guide containing the technical specifications of the 8 measurements is available. It is accompanied by self-assessment tools and training programmes to support and guide professionals in their awareness of the importance of well-being in the management of the farm.

In his Conclusions, MEP **Jean Arthuis** said he was impressed by the different solutions put in place by the European equine industry to improve the welfare of horses.

As decision makers in the European Parliament, we must also listen to the proposals and act:

- Keep equids in agricultural policy because they are farm animals
- Create solidarity with a fund that can support end-of-life issues - owners wishing to exclude equidae from the food chain could contribute to this fund or through insurance
- Promote charters and guidelines in all EU languages to benefit from the experience of professionals.

In this sector, it is a question of reconciling passion and economic realism. Communication on ethics and accountability builds knowledge and prevents mistreatment.