

EHN/ European Parliament meeting

On the 25th January 2012 the second meeting of the European Parliament Horse Group led by European Parliament Member, Julie Girling, was held at the European Parliament in Brussels.

It was standing room only for some at the meeting which attracted a large attendance from not only Parliamentarians, but European Commission representatives, members of Permanent Representations and European equine organisations. The meeting focused on what the current Common Agricultural Policy proposals published by the European Commission might mean for the horse sector.

Julie Girling opened the meeting by talking about her own constituency in the South West of England. "I am a horse rider myself" she said, "so you might think I will be a little bit biased. But as I regularly travel round my constituency visiting farms and rural businesses, I see that horses are really important to the rural economy here in the South West." She added, "Of course, it is right that a major part of the debate on CAP reform is how to ensure sustainable food production in Europe. These proposals, however, also place a much bigger emphasis than ever before on how to support rural employment and rural development. In this the horse sector has a huge role to play, not forgetting that horses contribute directly to farm incomes in every single country in the EU."

Britta Reimers German European Parliament member and a working farmer, talked about the many positive opportunities the horse sector offered for rural development sustainability and growth.

Cathy McGlynn of the European Horse Network and the European Federation of Thoroughbred Breeders Associations gave an overview of how the current CAP "Horses graze over six million hectares of permanent pastureland in the Europe" she said. "The breeding of horses in particular is an extensive activity in terms of land use – this must be taken into account in the current discussions."

Pit Schlechter of the European Draught Horse Federation, reminded the audience of the important role played by over 800,000 working horses in the EU – "the working horse is a perfect example of a renewable and ecologically friendly energy source, which can still be an economically sound alternative to machines in farms and forestry" he said.