



EHN statement on mares used in the production of Equine Chorionic Gonadotrophin (eCG)

Brussels, 10th July 2024

In March 2022, the Animal Welfare Foundation filed a complaint against Iceland at the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Surveillance Authority for non-compliance with the rules applicable in the European Economic Area regarding the production of the hormone equine chorionic gonadotrophin (eCG).

Equine chorionic gonadotrophin (eCG), formerly known as pregnant mare serum gonadotrophin (PMSG), is a fertility hormone extracted from the blood of pregnant mares and used in industrial breeding, mainly pig breeding. The hormone is used to improve the fertility of females, synchronise births and optimise the reproductive performance of livestock.

On 15 September 2023, the Icelandic authorities responded to the EFTA and acknowledged that they had failed to fulfil a number of obligations under Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. Since November 2023, blood extraction to obtain the fertility hormone eCG has been considered an animal experiment in Iceland. However, according to the 3Rs principle (replacement, reduction, refinement), animal experiments must be replaced by alternative methods that do not involve the use of live animals whenever possible.

Iceland represents a significant supplier of eCG to the EU market. Recent information confirms that this controversial business continues to operate in Iceland under a licence valid until October 2025. Currently, around 5,000 mares in about 90 farms are kept in Iceland for the commercial production of blood.

The practice of extracting blood from pregnant mares for purely commercial purposes is of ethical concern as it often results in the mistreatment of mares on so-called blood farms. The blood extraction process, the way the mares are handled, the artificial insemination process, overbreeding and the potential abortions each put the welfare of mares at serious risk with no benefit to their own wellbeing. Furthermore, these mares are not usually kept meeting minimum welfare standards.

The European Horse Network calls for clear regulations, transparency and rigorous enforcement to ensure the welfare, good treatment, and handling of these mares, to prevent stress and injury risks.

Additionally, strict rules on blood collection should be developed based on the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health. If a fully transparent, monitored and evaluated blood collection process cannot be developed and properly regulated that wholly protects the welfare of all equidae involved in this production, then we would call for a ban on this industry, aligning with the expert opinion of the Federation of European Equine Veterinarians.

With regard to alternative methods to the use of eCG, there are currently no synthetic alternatives that are economically viable and can completely replace eCG.

The EHN therefore encourages the Commission to promote research and innovation in this field as much as possible, so that the production of the equine hormone eCG using blood extraction is gradually abandoned in favour of practices that do not involve mares or involve them only to a limited degree.

The European Horse Network (EHN) is a non-profit network of stakeholders acting at a World-European-, National- or Regional-level within the European horse, pony, donkey and welfare sector. The welfare of equines is paramount for EHN.

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