DRAFT REPORT

on responsible ownership and care of equines
(2016/2078(INI))

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

Rapporteur: Julie Girling
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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on responsible ownership and care of equines
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The European Parliament,

– having regard to Article 43 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the functioning of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy,

– having regard to Article 114 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the establishment and functioning of the single market,

– having regard to Article 168(4)(b) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on measures in the veterinary and phytosanitary fields which have the protection of public health as their direct objective,

– having regard to Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which lays down that, in formulating and implementing the Union’s agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals, while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage,


– having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing,


Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005¹,


– having regard to the Judgment in case C-424/13, Zuchtvieh-Export GmbH v Stadt Kempten, of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 23 April 2015,


– having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘Europe, the world’s No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe’ (COM(2010)0352),

– having regard to the conclusions of the Commission’s EDUCAWEL study³,

– having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A8-0000/2016),

A. whereas the equine sector within the EU is worth over EUR 100 billion per annum⁴ and accounted for an additional total turnover of EUR 27.3 billion in betting in 2013 alone, with EUR 1.1 billion received by Member State governments⁵;

B. whereas approximately 900 000 jobs are created solely by the equestrian sports industry⁶;

C. whereas the European Union is the largest market for the equestrian sports industry globally⁷;

D. whereas the estimated 7 million equidae in the EU perform hugely varied roles, from racing and competition animals to pets, working animals in transport, tourism, forestry and agriculture, sources of milk and meat, research animals, and wild and semi-feral

⁴ Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), FAQs on High Health, High Performance Horse (HHP) Concept adopted at the May 2014 OIE General Session.
⁶ Presentation to the European Equestrian Federation General Assembly by Ali Küçük (EEF Secretary General), 21.10.2014.
⁷ FEI database, accessed on 22.9.2014.
animals, and whereas they may perform several of these roles during their lives;

E. whereas equidae are the most transported animals in Europe in proportion to their population;

F. whereas the data on the movements of equidae for commercial purposes are recorded via the Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES), but this data is only released annually and with a two-year delay; whereas readily available data could help competent authorities and other organisations to better monitor animal health effects and to investigate subsequent indications of poor biosecurity;

G. whereas there is insufficient data available to directly quantify how many working equidae are used on small and semi-subsistence farms, 86% of which are found in the newer Member States, and in tourism;

H. whereas access to equid professionals, including veterinarians and farriers, varies widely across the Union, with consequences for equid health and welfare and for the livelihood of the owner;

I. whereas the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) adopted guidelines concerning working equidae in May 2016;

J. whereas equidae provide valuable employment and revenue to localities from tourism, but the welfare of some equidae is compromised and tourists are too often insufficiently informed to identify welfare problems;

K. whereas unlimited, indiscriminate and irresponsible breeding of equidae can lead to animals that are devoid of economic value and are often left with serious welfare problems, particularly during an economic downturn; whereas equid abandonment has increased since 2008 in western Member States, especially where they have become expensive luxuries as opposed to working animals;

L. whereas equidae are used in a range of therapies and rehabilitation programmes, including autistic spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, cerebral vascular incident, learning or language disabilities and difficulties, offender rehabilitation, psychotherapy, post-traumatic stress disorder and addiction programmes;

M. whereas owners are faced with difficult decisions when they are no longer able to sufficiently care for their equidae; whereas in some Member States euthanasia is too often the first recourse for owners who are no longer able to meet the equid’s welfare needs, yet in other Member States, equidae can only be euthanised where there is a clear immediate veterinary need, irrespective of the long-term welfare of the animal concerned;

1. Recognises the considerable economic and social contribution equidae make throughout

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1 TRACES database 2012.
4 The Donkey Sanctuary & University College Dublin: Donkey Welfare in Ireland in 2015.
the EU;

2. Notes that good equid health and welfare boosts the economic output of farms and businesses alike and benefits the rural economy overall;

3. Affirms that equid owners should have a minimum level of knowledge of equid husbandry, and that with ownership comes a personal responsibility for the standard of health and welfare of the animals in their care;

4. Underlines the importance of the forthcoming Animal Welfare Reference Centres for improved levels of compliance with, and consistent enforcement of, legislation, along with the dissemination of information and best practice relating to animal welfare;

5. Calls on the Commission to commission a Eurostat study to analyse the economic and social impact of all aspects of the equid sector;

6. Calls on the Commission to actively support the development of guides to good practice, by releasing resources for translation of such documents and assisting with their distribution;

7. Calls on the Commission to support the production and dissemination of information on how to meet the needs of equidae, whatever their role, based around the ‘five freedoms’ and covering the entirety of an equid’s life; calls also on the Commission to include guidance on responsible breeding and the benefits of equid sterilisation; recommends that such guidance should be disseminated to breeders, equid societies, farms, stables, sanctuaries, transporters and slaughterhouses, and that it should be accessible in a variety of formats, including online;

8. Urges the Commission to expand its educational resources on farm welfare to encompass equid welfare via the Farm Advisory System;

9. Calls on the Commission to recommit to the development of a European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism, with the dissemination of clear information to help tourists make welfare-friendly choices when deciding whether or not to use the services of working equidae;

10. Calls on the Commission to make data from TRACES available to the public with far less delay than at present;

11. Calls on the Commission to ensure effective and uniform enforcement of existing EU legislation on animal transport and legally binding reporting across all Member States; requests that the Commission propose a shortened maximum journey limit for all movements of horses for slaughter, based on findings of the European Food Safety Authority;

12. Calls on the Commission to formulate guidance for the Food and Veterinary Office on the welfare of equidae at the time of slaughter;

13. Calls on the Member States to commit to inspections of the slaughterhouses on their territory that are licenced to take equidae, to ensure they are able to meet the specific
welfare needs of equidae;

14. Calls on the Commission to commit to the development of validated Animal Welfare Indicators, which should be used to assess the welfare of equidae, identify existing problems and help drive improvements;

15. Calls on the Commission to prioritise a pilot project to examine the use of new and existing funding schemes to reward good welfare outcomes for working equidae, including those on small and semi-subsistence farms;

16. Calls on the Member States to ensure that Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/262 (Equine Passport Regulation) is fully and properly implemented;

17. Notes that owing to the price of veterinary medicines, the cost of carcass disposal and the cost of euthanasia, where permitted, can serve as a barrier in themselves to the ending of an equid’s life, leading to prolonged suffering; calls on the Member States to investigate reports of inhumane practices during euthanasia, such as the improper use of drugs;

18. Calls on the Commission to issue guidance on donkey milk farming; calls on the Member States to commit to increasing the number of inspections on donkey milk farms;

19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The scale of the equid sector in the European Union

Equidae have a unique place in European history and civilisation. They are the most versatile of animals, not only providing milk and meat, they are also sporting athletes, companion animals, working animals in transport, tourism, forestry, agriculture and therapy, research animals, and wild and semi-feral animals too.

According to Fédération Equestre Internationale, the equid sector is worth over € 100 billion per annum. The EU’s estimated 7 million equidae use at least 2.6 million hectares of land\(^1\) and at least 900,000\(^2\) jobs are dependent solely on the equestrian sports industry across the EU.

It is clear that the equid sector can have a huge impact on local economies – particularly in rural areas. A report into the French equid sector also found high-levels of part-time female employment\(^3\).

In some Member States, equidae play a less easily quantifiable role in the local economy – that of working animals on small and semi-subsistence farms (SSFs), and in tourism. No data exists to accurately quantify the numbers of animals used on SSFs, however there are a reported 600,000 – 800,000 equidae present in Romania, around 80% of which are used for

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\(^1\) See [http://faostat3.fao.org/browse/Q/QA/E](http://faostat3.fao.org/browse/Q/QA/E), accessed 11.02.15

\(^2\) Presentation to the European Equestrian Federation General Assembly by Ali Küçük (EEF Secretary General), 21 October 2014

working activities, such as for the transportation of goods and people, and for agriculture and forestry work\(^1\).

The equid sports and leisure market in Europe is the largest in the world. 21% of global Thoroughbreds were produced within the 28 Member States. 93% of the world’s jump races in 2013 taking place within the Union, along with 21,000 flat races in 2013 and over 43,000 trotting races. In addition the majority of FEI events (such as jumping, dressage, eventing and para-dressage) were held in the EU in 2014.

The equid sector also provides opportunities for entrepreneurs across Europe, and for those in rural areas in particular. For example, donkey milk farming is a traditional practice in parts of Italy, and farms also operate in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Cyprus and Romania. Indeed donkey milk is believed to be beneficial to its drinkers in a number of ways, and is seen as the best substitute for human milk\(^2\) for infants and sick children. Whilst the price of donkey milk fluctuates, it generally retails between € 8 to € 15 per litre.

Likewise, equidae are widely used in therapy and rehabilitation, and provide further economic opportunities and societal benefits in doing so. Hippotherapy is used by the Riding for the Disabled Association and The Donkey Sanctuary in the UK to assist people with a range of conditions, including autistic spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, cerebral vascular incident and learning of language disabilities\(^3\). Across Europe, 21 Member States have one or more organisations or individuals which are members of the Federation of Horses in Education and Therapy International AISBL (HETI)\(^4\).

The EU’s equidae also provide a source of meat and, to a lesser extent, equid leather. The number of animals slaughtered is difficult to ascertain, as it varies from year to year. Many Member States showed an increase in slaughtering from 2011 – 2012, with figures falling again in 2013.

**Welfare concerns and their causes adversely impacting on the equid sector**

Research undertaken by World Horse Welfare and Eurogroup for Animals in the report Removing the Blinkers: The Health and Welfare of European Equidae in 2015, shows that despite the breadth of the sector, the welfare problems facing Europe’s 7 million equidae are remarkably similar.

The treatment of working equidae is a particular cause of concern in a number of Member States, especially where there are large equid populations, and where they are used on SSFs. As many of these equidae can live on easily available foodstuffs, such as grass and hay, they may be perceived as needing little in the way of specialist attention. However, welfare

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4. [http://www.frdi.net/membership_list.html](http://www.frdi.net/membership_list.html) accessed 02.09.14
problems caused by inexpert amateur farriery or unsuitable harnesses do not simply cause distress and suffering to the individual equid, but also compromise the ability of the animal to work efficiently and its longevity, thus also negatively impacting upon the farm or the business.

Many of the same problems are found where equidae are used in tourism. In some instances, the welfare of the equid is seriously compromised by their work, which consequently impacts upon the efficient functioning of the enterprise. Although these animals are often working in plain sight, they may continue to suffer welfare problems if tourists are unable to identify potential welfare problems.

In the equid sport sector, Europe’s breeders are often to be found at the forefront of the world. European studbooks lead the World Breeding Federation for Sports Horses (WBFSH) classifications for eventing, jumping and dressage. However, unlimited equid breeding may cause serious welfare problems. Equidae can quickly become the victims of economic misfortunes. High demand for equidae during times of high economic prosperity may lead to indiscriminate breeding of less high-quality animals. In downturns, these animals lose much of what value they had and may become entirely worthless in a financial sense. It is no surprise that many Member States, particular in the west of the Union, have seen a dramatic rise in equid abandonment in recent years.

Figure 2: Prevalent welfare problems as reported by NGOs in Removing the Blinkers: The Health & Welfare of Equidae in 2015

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1RSCPA, World Horse Welfare, Redwings, the British Horse Society, Blue Cross & Horse World: Left on the verge: in the grip of an equine crisis in England and Wales, 2013

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The cost of keeping equidae varies greatly depending on the Member State and region in question, the purpose of the animal and the method of keeping. However, with few options for rehoming, and in times of a contracted market for the sale of the equid, some owners choose to send their animals to slaughter, or euthanise their animals, if this is affordable and legally available. Sadly, it is clear that those who take responsibility for an equid are not always aware of the costs and time commitment involved in taking care for such an animal, particularly when, during times of oversupply, purchase prices have fallen to as low as € 5 per animal.1

Given their multifarious roles, it is little surprise that equidae are the most transported animals within the EU, as a proportion of their overall population.2 Whilst these movements are captured by the Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES), data is currently released annually, with a two-year delay. This delay impedes Competent Authorities and other organisations to see how the movement of equidae is affected by external factors and affects other areas in turn. For example, the movement of equidae for slaughter may be linked to an increase in the incidence of notifiable diseases3 in the population of non-slaughter equidae – perhaps therefore indicating that biosecurity standards are poor.

Equidae for slaughter also move frequently between Member States, and are also exported to third countries (notably to Russia), in conditions which often compromise their welfare. They are particularly vulnerable as there is little incentive for transporters to ensure the welfare of these animals during transit.

Where equidae are used for purely farming purposes, it is important that animal health and welfare remain priorities. Consumers must remain protected, and should know that equid-derived products, such as donkey milk, are safe. Indeed, welfare on farms where donkey milk is produced varies greatly. On some farms milking is still undertaken by hand, whilst in others milking machines are in place. In addition, levels of surveillance are in no way comparable to those of cows’ milk farms, although this may be due to the fact that fewer human pathogens are found in donkey milk. Furthermore, whilst the legal standards applying to equid milk are unclear and inspections and supervision inconsistent across the EU.

**Recommendations to unlock the economic potential of the equid sector, and to advance good equid health & welfare**

Whilst the full size and scale of the equid sector is not completely clear, it is apparent that it has a disproportionately large economic impact upon the economy given the relatively small number of animals involved. However, it is clear that guidance and the sharing of best

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1 DSPCA: ‘Ireland’s Horse Crisis’, http://www.dspca.ie/equinecrisis
2 TRACES data
3 The Donkey Sanctuary & University College Dublin: Donkey Welfare in Ireland in 2015 (Chapter 5, pages 55 - 71)
5 The Donkey Sanctuary, personal communication
6 Keith Meldrum CB BVM&S MRCVS DVSM Hon. FRSPH, personal communication
practice could drive bottom-up change and could do a lot to address problems that stem from mere ignorance.

For instance, a number of organisations have undertaken work to develop guides to the good practice for the transportation of equidae. Practical Guidelines on the Watering of Equine Animals Transported by Road were published in 2014, and new guidelines have recently been developed on equid fitness for transport. The Commission should actively support the development of such guides to good practice, not only to assist with levels of compliance and to ensure consistent enforcement, but fundamentally to ensure the proper care of these animals during long and short distance transport.

Likewise, many NGOs have produced guidance on meeting the basic needs of equidae from birth to the end of life. By way of an example, World Horse Welfare produced guidelines four years ago entitled ‘Five ways to ensure a happy, healthy horse’. Such guidance, adapted to meet the needs of all equidae, translated, available in a variety of formats and promoted by the Commission, could do much to enhance the knowledge of equid owners and handlers alike, and would safeguard not only the health and welfare of the individual animals, but their long term economic value and output too.

The previous Commission began to develop a European Charter for a Sustainable and Responsible Tourism, which was foreseen as including information to assist tourists in making welfare-friendly choices when deciding whether to use the services of working equidae. The Rapporteur urges the Commission to recommit to the idea of the charter, and to empower tourists to make choices which will not only reward those enterprises which properly care for their equidae, but which will also inform and provide peace of mind to the consumer in the process.

The handling requirements of equidae are quite different from many other species, and nowhere is this more apparent than at the time of slaughter. The Commission should explore the possibility of disseminating guidance to slaughterhouses which are licenced to take equidae. In turn, the FVO and the Competent Authorities should also increase the number of inspections on these premises.

Indeed the measuring of compliance with proper standards also helps to drive improvements. As such, the Commission should commit to the establishment of new Animal Welfare Reference Centres, and the development of validated Animal Welfare Indicators for equidae. These indicators should be used to encourage and rewarded farmers where possible, and the Commission should commit to investigating such possibilities through a new pilot project.

Finally, Member States should commit to increasing the number of inspections on donkey milk farms, particularly in lieu of a professional association for donkey farmers, and as many lack quality control standards. The Commission could also play a role here in disseminating guidance on donkey milk farming from expert institutes and NGOs.

Whilst responsible ownership and care should always be expected as a minimum, many of the health and welfare problems faced by Europe’s equids today show that it is too often left by the wayside. However, the initiatives suggested here would increase awareness, information and incentives, and could help unlock the full economic potential of the equid sector in the
EU, whilst better protecting the welfare of these unique animals we value so much as a society.