

Research – Horizon 2020

Knowledge and education of the single horse owner and keeper is essential to improve the health and welfare of horses all over the EU. Improvement of procedures inside the industry as well as the development of medicines and vaccines is an ongoing process, which constantly needs to be nourished. Attention to these needs has to come from both the industry itself as well as from the public interest.

The Equine Industry as well as the universities inside the EU therefore has to be aware of the possibilities for funding inside the new Horizon 2020 research program recently adopted by the European parliament. Development of new knowledge and new procedures is vital for the industry in every aspect, economic as well as welfare and health wise.



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Equine Health

Equine health and welfare is pure human welfare

The welfare of the estimated more than 6 million horses in Europe has lately been shown to affect more people than just horse owners. The horse as an obligatory instrument for transport and labor in farming, in industry or for private purposes is no longer a necessity for most persons. Keeping of horses is today now widely connected with human leisure and wellbeing, although the role of the horse in maintaining and keeping forest and landscape must be recognized as vital in many cultures. However horses in many countries are also bred and slaughtered for human consumption.

The welfare of the horse is therefore closely connected with human welfare mainly as part of the leisure industry, but in many households also as a companion animal, that is a part of the family. The health and welfare of the horse does not only affect the more than 400,000 people in Europe that professionally works with them. It does also have an enormous impact on the many families that keep, feed and use them in their everyday life.



Disease surveillance

Horses are today highly movable animals and are constantly shipped and transported around Europe for leisure, competition, trade and slaughter for human consumption. A high level of health and disease control is therefore vital for both the industry and the single horse owners in all part of The Union.

The high importance of establishing effective, on-going disease surveillance for both exotic and endemic diseases affecting horses has been made very clear on multiple occasions by the responsible organizations, not only by the OIE, FAO, IFHA and FEI but also the EU as well as national competent authorities.

To provide effective countermeasures for controlling the emergence of equine exotic diseases as well as controlling endemic diseases, it is imperative that best practice is identified and shared between all Member States including optimum laboratory techniques, building networks of recognized specialists, establishing contingency plans and developing continuing education for all levels of the equine industry. Until now most expertise and surveillance has been directed towards exotic diseases on both the national and international level. For most stables and horse owners endemic disease however is a more everyday threat to the welfare and wellbeing of the horse. Endemic disease and disease spread cause an ongoing economic and welfare loss to the entire equine industry. It is therefore a vital need for the entire equine sector to direct expertise and funding towards a European level of controlling endemic diseases. For this a pan European effective surveillance system has to be established, as it is in national programs such as the French RESPE network and in the Thoroughbred industry in the UK at the Animal Health Trust.



Medicine availability

The proposed Animal Health Law recognizes the relations between animal health, animal welfare, public health and the environment as well as it states "that prevention is better than cure". Statements from the horse industry's point of view all need to be looked at in combination to be effectively promoted.

Prevention of disease and prevention of spread of disease in the horse population of Europe should always be the overall goal. However when disease occurs, it is vital that the veterinarians and the horse owners do have the access to proper medicines. This is right now not always the case because of different licensing and marketing of medicinal specialties in different countries.

In many, especially small, countries only a few products registered for the use in horses are available, because of significant costs for the producers to register the medicinal specialties in every single country with often a limited market. An easy procedure to enable use of medicinal products registered in other countries inside the EU or a common EU registratory body is therefore greatly needed.



Antimicrobial resistance

The horse industry welcomes that the proposed Animal Health Law takes antimicrobial resistance into account, and suggests that microorganisms that have developed resistance to antimicrobials should be given special attention in the listed diseases and covered by the scope of this Regulation. Nevertheless more clarity on how this is foreseen to be implemented in practice, as prevention and control of these pathogens is different from other listed diseases, has to be worked out.

Responsible use of antimicrobials is high on the list in Equine Veterinary Associations and Horse Owner Associations all over the EU. A new survey conducted by FEEVA (Federation of European Equine Veterinary Association) clearly demonstrates that when best practice is compromised by the treating veterinarian, it is nearly always because of lack of registration of proper alternatives in the specific country.



The new European animal health law will also affect the horse industry.

The new EU-commission proposal for an animal health law aims to bring the large body of European Union (EU) animal health legislation into one single and clearer regulatory framework. The potential benefits of enhanced animal health and welfare are great; for animals, their owners, society, public health and the wider economy. However secondary legislation that forms essential

components to implement this proposed regulation still needs to be done. The European Commission also needs to prepare a roadmap for the drafting of this secondary legislation. This in particular is the case, when equine health and equine diseases are discussed. It is therefore vital that the stakeholders in the horse industry is consulted in due time, before this secondary framework is drafted.