
International Movement of Competition Horses

8 April 2013

John McEwen, FEI 1st Vice President and Chairman of the FEI Veterinary Committee, opened the session by saying that the International Movement of horses between countries in order to compete at FEI events had for as long as he could remember been the source of many problems due to the lack of a harmonised approach to our highly supervised horses. This had become much worse as the number of FEI events had increased substantially across the globe. However working with the World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE), the need for a substantial change was now recognised. This change would be delivered through a partnership with the OIE and he welcomed Dr Susanne Munstermann as the FEI expert to work exclusively within the OIE on this task. He thanked the FEI President for her work in this area, the FEI HQ for bringing the project to this stage, and FEI Solidarity donator, HE Raja Al Gurg for facilitating this important project for the future of the sport. A video outlining all the work done to date.

Dr Graeme Cooke, FEI Veterinary Director, started the session with an overview of size of the equestrian sport economy across the world, showing the high levels of employment and that this had never really been properly recognised before. With this economy came a need to move horses across borders in order to compete. Hence it was time to recognise these movements as a form of regular global trade and to find a way to practically harmonise it.

Dr Susanne Munstermann outlined how the OIE has been delegated by an agreement with the World Trade Organisation to provide the frameworks and Codes for the approach to the health standards needed for the movement of animals in a safe and transparent manner. She also described the processes to be followed to bring any new approach before the member states of the OIE for acceptance.

The FEI Veterinary Director gave an overview of what the FEI currently does well to prevent the risk of disease spread within the Veterinary Regulations. He explained that nevertheless governments often adopted unnecessarily strict import requirements for the temporary import of horses to their territories as they often had no official category of horses to put these high performance horses into and they therefore legally they had to treat all horses in the same way. This was compounded by the fact that equestrian sport had not established a clear and established message about the existing high levels of veterinary supervision of these horses.

Dr Alf Fuessel of the European Commission gave an overview of the regulations for horse movements within and into the EU. He described the regulatory frameworks and how horses were the most mobile of all the domesticated species within the EU. From July 2009 all EU horses must preferably be microchipped as well as having a passport. Movements within the EU required a health certificate. Registered horses (which includes FEI passported horses) were treated as a different population of horses from that of breeding and slaughter horses.

He concluded by saying that animal health risks arising from international movements of race and competition horses are manageable by:

Defining an acceptable level of protection in line with OIE principles

- Appropriate import conditions limited to important diseases
- Using mitigating measures such as:
 - vaccination with licensed vaccines
 - testing by use of validated methods in qualified laboratories

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- harmonising relevant minimum residence and quarantine periods

The application of OIE principles

- Responsible veterinary services and immediate disease notification
- Ethics of certification

Dr Munstermann then outlined a broad global strategy for the facilitation of the international movement of high Health/Performance (HHHP) horses. Building on existing measures that protect the health of the high performance horses, there were opportunities for a global harmonised approach creating an official category of horse provisionally termed the HHP horse.

Such a category of horse would require certain as yet to be refined criteria to be met

1. Health

- free from OIE notifiable diseases
- have had core vaccinations with region specific vaccinations

2. Have met certain Performance Levels Criteria

3. Identification and Traceability Characteristics

- passported and micro-chipped
- be listed on a database

4. Certification

- accreditation of the usual residence, and competition venue as being compliant with Biosecurity guidelines.

Dr Munstermann finished by saying a key part of putting in place the HHP sub population would be the industry working with governments to ensure that measures were met jointly.

Q&A

An extremely very wide variety of questions around the session were put to a panel that consisted of the speakers and joined by Dr Sergio Salinas (MEX), FEI Veterinary Committee. The following examples of comments were made by members of the audience.

There were congratulations for having reached this advanced stage of a complex process but a request was made as to how long the remaining process would take. Dr Munstermann explained that with various consultations within the OIE governance, full implementation at the may not take place for a few years. However the promotion of a biosecurity code and making governments aware of the level of care for horses within the sport could start much sooner than that. Dr Cooke supported that comment as change had already been seen in South America through simply bringing together the relevant officials.

A query was made on what was meant by a regional approach. The FEI and the OIE replied saying that clearly some disease risks differed between regions. For example there were diseases in Asia that were not common in Europe. Hence the core vaccination approach needed to consider that variation. There might also be different performance criteria for each region as in some regions the highest levels of performance were different relative to other regions.

Another comment was that if biosecurity was to be a key part of the process, what would the FEI be able to do to support the National Federations. The intention of the FEI was to produce an easily understood approach to biosecurity that could be applied across the sport. This approach must also be undertaken with horseracing so that one recognised approach developed that could be recognised by governments.

Dr Fuessel was asked questions on the problems of moving of horses into the EU from Eastern Europe which he took note of.

A query was raised by World Horse Welfare that if movements were made more practical, then was there a risk of over competing horses? The FEI said that there was not any firm evidence of that to date, but with the FEI real-time entries system, the frequency of competition could soon be very easily monitored so that if a change did occur, it would be rapidly recognised.

Dr Cooke completed up the session with a response to query as to how National Federations should deal with governments. He said that the advantage of a common approach across NFs and the FEI family was that if one story could be told to governments then NFs could feel confident that what they were saying was the universal approach. The system of National Head FEI Veterinarians would be key and in time the FEI could provide a common script to be used by all National Federations to help with ensuring that there was that universal story.