

Equidae in the EU Movement-Trade-Imports

In the context of the establishment of the single market and motivated by the incursion of African horse sickness into the Iberian Peninsula, the Council adopted a number of Directives aiming at removing obstacles to trade for animal health, zootechnical or competition reasons, but also to lay down control measures for African horse sickness, the conditions for trade in and imports of semen, ova and embryos and aspects of animal welfare during transport.

Recent estimates provided by the 25 Member States suggest that there are about 5.5 million equidae, half of them classified as registered equidae.

The scope of Directive 90/426/EEC relating to animal health aspects includes holdings in the wider understanding including nature reserves where equidae live in freedom and includes all species of the family of equidae. It furthermore affects registered equidae, equidae for breeding and production and equidae for slaughter and thereby clearly defines the health status of a holding, a region or a country by the health status of the least privileged member of the equidae family.

The provisions on the notifiability of certain listed diseases ensure passive surveillance for major equine diseases and early implementation of control measures in case of suspicion or confirmation of any of these infections. The diseases of concern are those classical horse diseases which are mostly eradicated in Europe, if they had ever occurred, in the early post-war years and therefore the sector is more concerned about other diseases such as equine herpes virus or influenza, or emerging diseases such as West Nile Fever. In line with the requirements of the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE), the disease notification system laid down in Council Directive 82/894/EEC has recently been amended and includes now the equine diseases.

The principles on veterinary controls laid down in Directive 90/425/EEC for trade and 91/496/EEC for imports apply of course also to equidae, their semen, ova and embryos, requiring veterinary inspection, and certification for trade and in addition isolation or quarantine and additional health test in case of imports. The two Directives also empower the Commission to rapidly react to animal health problems by adopting protective measures.

The list of today 56 Third Countries from which Member States authorise imports of equidae and their germinal products is subdivided in sanitary groups (A to G) depending on the prevailing or perceived risks. The presentation includes a world map showing on slide 21 the exporting countries and their classification according to these groups. According to the principle policy of the Community, regionalisation is applied. However, unlike in other species, such regionalisation is not limited to the definition of disease free areas, but also includes limitations on the category of equidae and the type of importation. All these details are now comprehensively explained in Decision 2004/211/EC.

Importation is further divided into several types: the temporary admission for less than 90 days, the re-entry after temporary export for less than 30 days and the permanent imports. By limiting certain types of importation to certain defined categories of equidae, for example temporary admission and re-entry are regulated only for registered horses; the risks of introducing infectious diseases are further limited. The appropriate references to current Decisions are displayed on slide 20 of the presentation.

The same principles as for live animals apply to trade in and imports of semen, ova and embryos of the equine species, with other words, if the stallion or the mare can be imported also the semen, ova and embryos can come, but must have been collected by approved centres and teams. The list of equine semen collection centres can be consulted on the website <http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/sanco/vets/information>. Different from other livestock species, stallions in semen collection centres must not necessarily be permanently resident in such centres, subject to additional testing, amongst others for diseases not listed as notifiable diseases in Annex A to 90/426/EEC, notably equine viral arteritis and contagious equine metritis. More animal health conditions are laid down in Annex D to Directive 92/65/EEC and the animal health certificates mentioned in slide 22 of the presentation.

Registered equidae are defined in Article 2 (c) of Directive 90/426/EEC. This registration is in most of the cases related to the identification carried out in accordance with the principles laid down by breeding organisations approved in accordance with Directive 90/427/EEC and in particular Commission Decision 92/353/EEC. Such organisations and the responsible authorities cooperate along the lines of Decision 92/354/EEC also across borders. The overall aim of this legislation is to ensure that trade is not impaired on zootechnical grounds and that equidae from one Member State may be entered in the studbook for the same breed maintained in another Member States. The criteria for entering eligible equidae in studbooks are those laid down in Decision 96/78/EC, that may require to establish merit classes within the main section of the studbook. The approval of an organisation as organisation that establishes or maintains the studbook of the origin of the breed is unique in Community zootechnical legislation.

The registration in a particular studbook may have consequences for the participation in certain competitions, which as a rule must be open and non-discriminatory for equidae registered and originating in other Member States, but for which certain derogations are provided for in Council Directive 90/428/EEC.

In accordance with Community animal health and zootechnical legislation laid down in Directives 90/426/EEC and 90/427/EEC respectively, equidae must be identified during their movement. The details for the identification and certification requirements are summarised in slide 12. Because equidae are considered food-producing animals, identification is a prerequisite to apply specific medicinal treatment without compromising public health and is part of the food-chain information. In order to improve traceability and to reinforce the requirements set down in Commission Decisions 93/623/EEC and 2000/68/EC for registered equidae and equidae for breeding and production, the Commission proposed a Regulation establishing the method of identification of equidae. The Regulation requires the approved breeding organisations or competent authorities to record in databases the issuing of unique identification documents to all equidae independently of their movement, and the gradual introduction of electronic transponders for active marking of foals. The code for the database in connection with the life number of the animal are the reference point for any modification of identification details of the animal concerned and must not conflict with the Universal Equine Life Number developed by major organisations for equestrian competition and breeding. The Regulation allows Member States to identify equidae moving on national territory by a smart card issued in complement of the passport, to simplify the identification of equidae marked with a transponder and to establish specific regimes for equidae kept under wild or semi-wild conditions.

Workshop 2: Animal breeding legislation: Horses – Implementation and standards of the new Member States and candidate countries including breeding organisations and insemination stations for horses
Alf-Eckbert FUESSEL, European Commission

The paper presented to the participants of the Equus2005 TAIEX seminar in Austria was intended to provide an overview of the complex legislation on equidae - the most mobile segment of Community livestock - within the “acquire communautaire” which is in its entirety available at the website of the Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection under the following link:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/liveanimals/equine/index_en.htm.

For completeness, readers of the present paper should also consult the presented by Dr. A. Gavinelli on animal welfare during transport.