

European equestrian sector signs declaration of intent on cooperation

The equestrian sector needs to be more visible in Europe. The Equus 2009 conference, which was held at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU, in Uppsala from 29 – 30 October, concluded with the European equestrian sector signing a declaration of intent on co-operation. Some 165 delegates from 20 countries attended the conference. The largest horse organisations in Europe will now conduct activities in a network with the aim of developing the sector. It is hoped that the conference will be repeated every third year, hosted by different countries.

“The horse industry is playing an increasingly important role in rural development throughout Europe. It provides job opportunities, income and a more varied landscape. Creating good animal welfare and winning customer confidence are important factors in developing the sector,” said Minister of Agriculture Eskil Erlandsson in his conference address.

Challenges for the sector

For a period of two days, from 29 - 30 October, major segments of Europe’s equestrian sector have gathered to discuss how it can assist in promoting rural development. Everyone agreed that the sector has an important role to play, but that it also faces a number of major challenges. For example, large parts of the work associated with horse breeding in Europe have been affected negatively by the economic crisis. The sector needs a clear strategy for dealing with fluctuations in the economy. The horse sector today provides many job opportunities, which are of considerable financial importance. Hobby activities represent an important part of the sector, but it is now important to develop more professional horse-related enterprises in order to increase stability in the sector.

Another challenge is that the horse sector must accept joint responsibility for environmental and climatic impact when it comes, for example, to transportation, fodder production and the storage and management of manure. The sector could also become a driving force in finding new ways to improve the environment. It is already the case that more and more local authorities in Sweden are using the horse for tasks such as mowing lawns and wastepaper management.

During the conference, consideration was also given to the matter of animal protection. Doping and illegal medication in both horseracing and other equestrian sports, as well as long transport distances for slaughter in southern Europe, mean that horses suffer unnecessarily. An increase in animal protection for all horses – not only competition horses – was a question taken up on a number of occasions during the conference. Minister of Agriculture Eskil Erlandsson made it particularly clear that animal welfare is a priority issue in Sweden, both now during the EU Presidency as well as in the future.

The need for continued investment in education and research within the horse sector was also discussed at the conference. Research cannot focus solely on veterinary medicine and animal sciences – the behaviour of horses, their role in society and their value for rehabilitation in the health care sector are other important areas.

Stronger co-operation gives greater opportunities to exert an influence

“It is very important for future development of the equestrian sector that the various segments of the sector are now gathered into one network. With stronger co-operation we will be able to draw up clearer guidelines and be a stronger force in influencing political decisions, at both EU level as well as nationally,” says Mats Denninger, Chairman of the Board of HNS (Swedish Horse Council Federation).

It seems likely that companies operating in the equestrian sector will be given more room in the EU’s next rural development programme. So the sector must be equipped to take advantages of the opportunities offered, and show why we should be investing in the horse sector on both a national and an international level.

Facts

The six organisations that signed the declaration of intent are:

- HNS (Swedish Horse Council Federation)
- UET (Union Européenne du Trot)
- EPMA (European Pari Mutuel Association)
- FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale)
- IFHA (the International Association of Horseracing Authorities)
- EFTBA (the European Association of Thoroughbred Breeders’ Associations)

HNS is the next organization to be responsible for continued work on the network.

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