

Questions from The Defra View, Arik Dondi

Nicholas de Brauwere, National Equine Welfare Council: Not so much a question as an expression of thanks. The 3rd edition of the equine welfare guidelines compendium was released late last year and an enormous amount of help was received from DEFRA to make it possible. Congratulations are due on the equine code of practice for horses in England that is important for the promotion of welfare.

Professor Ronald Jones, Chairman, Farriers Registration Council – Arik Dondi mentioned the Chief Vet officer but didn't mention anything about the state veterinary service. It is well known by many veterinary surgeons that it has been decimated over the last 20 years. He hopes that the SVS will get some protection and some acknowledgment in the plans for the new Animal Health Bill.

Arik Dondi – the SVS which is now known as Animal Health, in the proposals it is foreseen that it will continue to do the delivery of the policies in that area. It is fair to say that the so called fiscal climate is very tough, with not much money around. Regarding recovery and cost sharing policy, in the proposals there is a board made up of industry experts and veterinary experts that will make decisions that will allow the sector more input into spending decisions. There are choices to be made about whether to invest more in border controls, in surveillance or preparedness on the ground to deal with disease outbreaks when they come. It is hoped that the new arrangements for which the draft bill is there, will allow there to be more transparency and participation in making spending decisions. The draft Bill, and primary legislation would have to go through parliamentary processes, meaning that any new organisational arrangement wouldn't be in place before 2012 so plenty of time for discussion.

John Shenfield, British Hanoverian Horse Society- The speaker said that as a part of the African Horse Sickness control measures that compensation of only £2500 will be paid for horses slaughtered that do not have AHS. Alan Guthrey the leading South African vet says that one of the main things that you have to do is to control animal movement. If people know though that you are only going to give them this amount when you slaughter their horse and it doesn't have AHS, and nothing if they are slaughtered when they do have it then nothing is going to stop them moving horses and this would be a disaster. Defra need to consider this. In the agricultural sector livestock people are fully compensated at market value. This part of the policy needs to be seriously rethought to get cooperation from the average member of the public.

Arik Dondi – A compensation policy varies widely across diseases and animals affected. There isn't one policy for some and another for others. We are getting many similar arguments out of the current consultation. As all will know AFS is a disease that is similarly transmitted to blue tongue, through insects and the control strategy for controlling these diseases known as vector borne takes account of this. In the case of blue tongue a very small number of animals that were healthy needed to be slaughtered. Once you know the disease is in the midge population then slaughtering animals isn't the most effective control approach. Therefore don't expect there to be large number of animals being slaughtered. The cap on the payment is meant to be an average value to cover the bulk of horses, not cover the high value ones and also have

to protect the public and important that the tax payer who is not a keeper of livestock is protected by the legislation put in place.

James Paice MP

Nick Meakin- National Equine Database – You say that there is a significant number of horses that don't have a passport. Can you tell us what evidence you have to support that statement?

James Paice – Well clearly you can't have evidence since we don't know how many there are. Everyone I speak to believes that there are a vast number that are not registered, especially the single horse owners. The racing sector and sports sector are all registered, but would be very surprised if there weren't a lot that are not.

Graham Suggett, Chairman NED Ltd – He would like to add to that there has been 1.2m passports issued. If there are a significant number without them then the figure for horses will be greatly in excess of 1.2m that is greater than anyone has previously estimated.

James Paice responded that he was happy to be persuaded, but also he had been told that are problems with stolen horses being issued with fake passports and also those who have been issued and then died and have not been de-registered. If there are significant number without passports then what do we do about them. If the system is there to help control disease, if there are unregistered horses then it undermines the system. Happy to be persuaded though when provided with evidence that the population is well covered.

Dr Mark Hillyer, Professor Pat Harris and Professor Chris Proudman

Abi Butcher, Horse and Hound – to Chris Proudman. Is there a role for the drug companies to play in reducing the use of wormers and concentrating on responsible ownership.

Chris Proudman – indeed there is. Many of the wormer companies are already encouraging the use of diagnostic testing to identify infected horses in order to market worming drugs in this way. Virbac and Merial have or are offering free or subsidised worm egg count tests to inform their customers' worming programmes. Pharmaceutical companies have as much at stake as anyone else. They want their products to be sustainable and still to be effective for decades into the future so they are being very helpful in this respect.

Comment from the Chair: Egg counts don't necessarily tell you what species are present.

Chris Proudman – Accepted this but added that they can give you some indication from the shape of the egg that you see.

Carole Brizuela, Harper Adams University College – on the educational side, most farmers will not worm cows post one year grazing, so perhaps the immunity side needs to be pushed more with horse owners.

Chris Proudman- the educational side is important and we see this particularly in the case of livery yards where farmers are diversifying into this business. The way we manage horses and parasite control is very different to cattle, especially those who are breeding young stock that go to market at an early stage. The seasonal patterns of parasite epidemiology in horses is different to cattle. The way we manage them makes

the pattern of infection totally different. It is important to speak to your vet about the strategy that is best for you. One size fits all solution for worm control isn't appropriate. There are different solutions for different situations and vets are becoming more involved with this area.

Tony Tyler- Question for Professor Pat Harris. One of the slides showed problems with straw as a feeding method but you also outlined importance of keeping stomachs full. Is there a good alternative to straw?

Professor Harris – It was mentioned that in that group of animals this was the case. In Denmark many ordinary horses that aren't on weight management tend to be fed on straw as it is easily available. As far as weight management, there are other low energy forage replacers with an element of straw. Personally she is wary of forage that is mainly straw as it can be an irritant and can alter the mat that is in the stomach. It can be used for part of feed but other aspects in other breeds would say that high levels of straw are contra-indicated as it can lead to impaction colics. Having spent a lot of time in Newmarket, Professor Harris personally was not a fan of straw. It is important for weight management to give low energy feed but really restrict feed and maximise time, using double or treble haynets, and being creative. You can't starve a horse or just give straw.

Nicholas de Brauwere on behalf of Redwings. He would stress when testing for worms the importance of it going alongside pasture management. They tried to move away from worming by controlling through manure pickup and due to volumes of horses they moved to the mechanical side. They were disappointed with this due to fields being uneven. If don't get to them quick enough worm counts didn't drop as much on the mechanically cleaned fields as on the manually cleaned fields. Everyone has to judge the success of their own scheme.

Chris Proudman - Yes, doesn't matter what worm control strategy is used, diagnostic testing is a good idea to check that it is working before you run into health problems.

John Shenfield to Mark Hillyer. – Mark mentioned that horses don't swallow their tongues. Are trainers wasting their time then tying them down?

Mark Hillyer – Good question, historically people thought they were swallowing their tongues. Does tongue position have something to do with upper respiratory dynamics? Yes – but without scientific evidence can't say what the situation is. Personally he was not a fan of tongue ties. Only piece of scientific work into their use did show a beneficial effect with their use. He was disappointed with the outcome, as had hoped it wouldn't have an effect. Not clear cut but needs further investigation.

David Muir, RSPCA – The term tongue tie and its use in racing, is not so much the fact that they tie it down, but what they tie them down with. The use of ladies tights is not a viable way of achieving the result you were talking about. Options exist in the form of a bandage that doesn't tighten up when you tie it but holds the tongue and wont cause injury. That is the area related to tongue ties that should be looked at.

Ashley Ede to Professor Harris – As a result of ulcers how high are the risks of peritonitis following? Regarding the treatment, can it be withdrawn too quickly and would it heighten the risk of peritonitis occurring?

She chose to pass the question on peritonitis onto Mark Hillyer or Chris Proudman. As far as withdrawal of treatment, there has been work done by the companies marketing the drugs on this. Some animals will rebound if you don't make the management changes. If you don't change the trigger factors after treating then some will revert back.

Regarding peritonitis – Mark Hillyer commented that certainly as far as adult horses, gastric ulcers virtually never cause peritonitis and they are only on the inside lining of the stomach, and they don't rupture in adults. The only time this happens is in foals but with different causes.

Miles Williamson Noble – a lay question. Does the splashing mean I should exercise my horse on a full stomach?

Professor Harris - Acid splashing is more a factor when you are not feeding horses regularly. If you don't feed, then you are increasing the risk, but if you do feed too close then you could affect the amount of energy available. For those not doing intensive exercise, you should be providing a small amount of feed as regularly as you can. With racehorses this is a problem but you could provide them a small amount of fibre leading up to the race. She would be recommending that you feed forage up to the time of riding. If the horse is a rapid eater then if you follow this by exercise then the animal can be dehydrated, so those animals need to be slowed down in their eating.

Holly Claridge

Dave Hunter – How did you come up with the use of shaving foam.

Holly Claridge - Her supervisor had been playing around with various options and heard that someone had used the foam and tried it in the CT machine. It started in cows legs first and worked.

Tony Silverman – Does she think that there is a greater degree of compression of the nerve coming down the neck, if the horse is ridden bent through the neck rather than the poll.

Holly Claridge – thinks certainly different types of the disease are aggravated where there is already signs of problems. In the normal horses without the problem it won't cause it.

Dr Madeleine Campbell

Richard Matson – He supports the method of micro chipping but surely there is a need to ask and ensure that all horses have passports. Mr Paice challenged us how to move to a higher percentage of passports. If all vets have to ask for the passport before treating them then we would be better off. Did she support this?

Dr Campbell - Currently vets only check passports if certain drugs are used. The more horses are chipped, the better the database should work.

Ben Mayes answered – The problem is the dead horses that still have their passports registered. Five percent of owners have submitted these passports back after euthanasia. The job is to get the database to be more effective. Vets obliged to check passports for signing in or out of food chain before treating with drugs. Vet practices though don't really have DEFRA guidelines. Enforcement is the issue. Passports are a legal obligation.

Dr Campbell also commented that a requirement that vets scan a horse to check there isn't already a chip there.

Abi Butcher – there is debate on hot branding and pain. What about freeze branding?

Dr Campbell- There is a dearth of evidence on any pain in freeze branding. Can't prove it does cause pain, but it may cause minimal discomfort. Freeze branding does appear to cause less pain.

Mr Paice – regarding freeze branding. In a previous life he used to work for Farmkey and freeze branded cattle and horses. From experience, any discomfort is momentary, due to numbness setting in. He would argue freeze branding is more welfare friendly.

Ben Mayes added though that on freeze branding, pain comes afterwards, as blood flow re-circulates. It may seem painless but it occurs later on.

John Sheffield – in Netherlands they use country code as 1st 3 digits. As with so many chips, numbers don't mean anything. Apparently dogs have 826 which is the UK code and we could possibly put a 0 in front of this. As far as the other point, as a PIA, he asked if could make a complaint to a local authority, but action doesn't happen. Trading standards officers don't have funds so that side of the enforcement has fallen through totally. Many don't change the ownership of the horse when they buy.

Regarding the cost of chipping, properly trained personnel do this. In the UK only vets do it. Is this feather bedding?

Dr Campbell – No it was a decision of the RCVS as it is an act of veterinary surgery. It is a deep implantation in an anatomical structure of a foreign body.

Paul Jepson, Horse Trust – regarding identification focus seems to be on amount of pain produced, but there are other factors including the amount of restraint required, Have to look at overall picture.

Dr Campbell – Agreed with this

Graham Suggett, Chairman, NED Ltd – Quite rightly several have raised the question of dead horses, as it is a big hole in the database. Very few owners report their horse's death. But every horse that goes through an abattoir is notified so we know of this through a direct link. We offered BEVA the opportunity of a similar direct link so that when they euthanize a horse they could notify us also. This is a solution in the vets own hands.

Dr Campbell- She believed that it is an issue of client confidentiality and whether a vet can report something relating to the horse.

Chris Howes previous chair of BEVA. Thought it a very good idea to adopt this scheme and looked forward to discussing this further. High proportion of animals are euthanized and a direct reporting scheme would be useful if they could avoid issues of data protection.

Nick Wallbridge, CEO NED – He would definitely like to take forward the vet cooperation and had a working prototype already. It is a legal requirement for owners to notify that their horse has died. On micro-chips, there is huge number of benefits, and for database it creates a physical tie between the record and the horse. Shouldn't we get every existing horse micro-chipped now, as in France rather than waiting 20 years.

Dr Campbell - could see a rationale for this.

Caroline Anns- Baldock

John Smales to Caroline Anns- Baldock – One of the important aspects is not just what you have on display but the opportunity for research. Can you say a little more about what research will be made available.

Caroline Anns-Baldock – They are hoping to identify somewhere within the M25, and the whole point is to make the collection accessible. At the moment she is being offered huge collections of photographs so allowing people access is the centrepiece of the project. It is to do with giving children the chance to learn what the role of the horse has been.

David Hunter

Tony Silverman – With advances being as they are, would he consider or be pushing for some of his riders to be competing with able bodied competitors?

David Hunter - Already happens in national competition day in day out. And they are really quite successful. One of the riders became national dressage champion and new grade 4 rider is in the able bodied young rider British dressage squad.

General discussion

Una Harley- suggested a number of topics for future forums, including more on breeding of horses, rare breed horses and guidance on importing regulations or on dealing with the horses being imported for the Olympics.

Sara Braithwaite – fact that there are many short presentations means lots of different subjects can be covered and thus appeals to a wide range of people.

Miles Williamson Noble- asked for comment on handling more controversial views. Should we have a single balanced view, or two extremes?

Nic Barker – in response to Miles, personally conflict for its own sake isn't very helpful, but balanced professional discussion is often very interesting.

HRH The Princess Royal

A personal view

We have been talking about training and increasing your knowledge base and changing attitudes. This leads me on to the attitude towards cross country riding and the increased levels of training. But the training, increased though it may be, is not always appropriate because by definition it is too controlled to be really useful for x country riding. It doesn't teach them the art of riding cross country, which in the past was something you learnt by trial and error, and mostly error without which you didn't learn very much. And you had to be able to understand that you had to make these errors – in skiing it is the same, you can't learn until you learn to fall – it is more difficult to do that riding but you have to make these errors.

Part of the problem is that if you learn in controlled circumstances, the cross country training venues are very good but the fences are all perfectly presented, the distances are spot on, they have made up take offs and landings. That isn't what cross country riding is about though and when they come to me and I watch them walk the course I have to close my eyes and walk away. They don't have any idea what they are doing out there. And there are a lot of people with them who ought to know better who don't seem to either– and it is a worry.

There is an aspect of narrowing, in some respects, the experience by putting too much expectation on training in its purest form. If you do this you are narrowing the base of the knowledge as you are not allowing people to go out to learn by experiment.

That happens not just in this country but in others as well. The fear of litigation and making mistakes has overridden the ability to really learn their business.

A tick box mentality means you learn less that way as you get so obsessed with the list of ticks that you don't understand the question never mind what the answer means. That has become an accepted form of business- People think “We don't need to train, we just give them this list to tick off and then assessment is easy”. Did they understand the question? No. We have to be careful when we talk about training what we are trying to achieve.

I know that the people who provide these cross country facilities for training are providing a service but there is a down side to all this that we have to be careful about. I would recommend, and don't know if you can formalise this, that you make people do things, not necessarily hunting, like hunter trails or team chasing. This taught me more about cross country riding than I had ever learnt before. And it was a minor miracle that I ever got round a Cross country course before then. Having said that because I had never hunted the old and bold said I would never get round a course particularly because I could do dressage – now it is the other way round, if you can't do Grand Prix dressage you don't get through the elite door. .

This would represent a shift in attitude but by making things appear to be safer and more controlled we have produced more bad accidents and damage than we ever had before. That should tell us something. But what I don't know is whether if you increase the numbers competing whether it is feasible to maintain training at a level that really introduces people to real cross country riding. But this is probably not necessary for the leisure riders. But for the high level sport I am not sure we have done anyone any favours. And this **is** a personal view.

I feel that an FEI seminar about a month ago showed a slight change of emphasis in courses that would indicate they recognise that the sense of the words “cross country” has all but disappeared in real terms from the fences they were building.

Fundamentally people should take responsibility for what they do. If you give them the concept that you are adapting the course to make it safer, then since you are doing it, it must be your fault if something goes wrong not theirs. I don't think that is true, but I can only suggest that as an explanation of why people's attitudes change.

This is an opportunity for me to not get into too much trouble for saying this.

Anywhere else I would do. I hope that for the Forum it means that if I can do that, that others may feel that they also may want to say something that is difficult to say but can be sensibly debated.