

Commission adopts single passport and matching chip for horses and other equidae

The European Commission adopted a Regulation that will help improve the health of horses, donkeys and other members of the "equine" family, as it creates a better and clearer identification system. All equidae will now have to acquire their individual passports within six months after their birth. At the same time, when the passport is issued, the animal will be tagged with an electronic chip that would be injected to its neck. The chip will match the passport. The proposal modernises the identification system of the equidae, which today are recognised via a hand-drawn outline diagram.

EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou said: "The current system of identifying horses is outdated. It needs to be adapted to the new identification technologies. The regulation adopted by the Commission addresses this issue. It creates a better identification system that in the end will help us fight possible animal diseases."

The aim

The aim of the Regulation is to improve the system for the identification of equidae as laid down for different categories of this family of animals in Commission Decisions adopted in 1993 and 2000 respectively. The new system will build on a single identification document –one passport– issued for lifetime when the animal is born or imported. The document will be linked to the animal by an electronic microchip (radio frequency identification – RFID) and the fact it was issued will be recorded in a database under a unique life number for the animal that will remain the constant reference even when its name is changed.

Identification is not only required for animal health reasons, but also to ensure compliance with certain public health requirements, because equidae may be slaughtered for human consumption. A specific derogation was granted in Directive 2001/82/EC on the Community Code relating to veterinary medicines for the off-label use of certain veterinary medicines in equidae. The Regulation provides for a standardised format to exclude an equine animal from the food chain if a certain medicinal treatment was applied or to suspend its slaughter for human consumption for 6 months if treatment was carried out with a particular set of listed medicaments.

Main elements

The new Regulation, foreseen to enter into force on July 1 2009, introduces or details the following main issues:

- a lifetime passport is issued for all equidae when they are born and independently of their movement status;
- when the passport is issued an electronic transponder (microchip) is injected to foals in order to ensure that only a single identification document is issued
- the issuing of the passport is recorded in a database under a unique life number that remains the lifelong reference even if the name of the animal is changed
- it is clarified that equidae for slaughter must be accompanied to the slaughterhouse by their passport as an essential part of the food-chain information required by the food law (including the information on possible specific treatment with veterinary medicines)
- MS may set up national databases or network existing databases
- MS may allow smart cards instead of paper passports for national movements
- provisions are made for the recovery of the microchip, in case of lost passports, and on the death of the animal in relation to the information on the database.
- the Regulation contains derogations for animals kept under feral conditions
- this Regulation does not affect the imports of equidae from third countries, but includes provisions on the identification of equidae definitively imported into the EU
- the Regulation also clarifies how to use the passport as a tool to immobilise equidae in case of animal health restrictions (movement restrictions)

For more information please visit:

http://www.ec.europa.eu/food/animal/identification/equine/index_en.htm