

THE FACTS ABOUT THE EU BAN ON IMPORTATION OF EGYPTIAN HORSES

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IN JUNE 2010, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S FOOD AND VETERINARY OFFICE (FVO) UNDERTOOK A SCHEDULED MISSION TO EGYPT TO ASSESS AND EVALUATE THE CONDITIONS, PRACTICES, AND CONTROLS IN PLACE TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE COMPLIANCE WITH EU STANDARDS FOR SAFE LIVE HORSE IMPORTATION. ITS FINAL MISSION REPORT DATED JULY 10, 2010 CONCLUDED THAT THE CONTROLS AND PRACTICES IN EGYPT WERE INSUFFICIENT TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS FOR LIVE HORSE IMPORTATION INTO THE EU. WHAT HAPPENED? WHY IS THIS BAN IN PLACE? WHO NEEDS TO DO WHAT TO CORRECT THE SITUATION? HORSE TIMES PROVIDES THE ANSWERS.



HOW THE FVO WORKS:

The FVO polices compliance with EU animal health and welfare standards. It enforces these standards by allowing or banning importation of animals following audits and inspections of EU member states and non-member trading and treaty countries, according to an annual published inspection schedule.

With respect to Egypt, this FVO compliance and enforcement function is a result of the 2001 Association Agreement between Egypt and the European Union supplemented by the parties' Action Plan of 2007. The published FVO programme for 2010 scheduled an inspection for Egypt as well as China and Jordan for compliance with EU requirements for the importation of live horses. In that year the FVO also inspected 50 other non-member trading or treaty countries for plant and animal health, and, in fact, in 2010 conducted two other scheduled programme inspections in Egypt, one for the plant health of palms and potatoes and the other for pesticide residues.

EU FINDINGS:

The FVO inspection team visited Egypt from 7 to 14 June 2010 and conducted 19 site visits. Its findings and conclusions ([full text link: http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/act_getPDF.cfm?PDF_ID=8476](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/act_getPDF.cfm?PDF_ID=8476)) can be summarised as follows:

1. Relevant National Legislation:

Legislation regarding equine infectious diseases has not been updated since 1967, is outdated, and does not include some serious diseases which need to be monitored. There is no requirement in the law for notification of contagious equine diseases and no rules for the collection, storage, trade or use of equine semen. The financial penalties found in the 1966 Agriculture Law for non-compliance have not been changed since then and are wholly inadequate for deterrence.

2. Competent Authority:

The main criticism of the organisation



of the governing authorities was that the civil service vets were free to also act as private vets, thus creating a conflict of interest in respect of certification for purposes of pre-export and export of live horses.

3. Laboratory Services:

There is only one official equine health lab in Egypt, but the lab had

been performing only tests for horse flu, not the other diseases required to be tested for importation, and while the lab had test kits for a range of infectious or contagious diseases those kits were either expired or had been held at inappropriate temperature affecting their reliability. There were no arrangements to certify and use other laboratories.

4. Animal Identification:

Identification of horses is private, voluntary, and unofficial, handled by the internationally-recognised Agricultural Organisation for Horses (EAO) and the Egyptian Equestrian Federation (EEF), even though by law Egypt's General Organisation of Veterinary Services is the official body in charge of identification and registration of horses and has not formally delegated these tasks to those organisations nor does it directly supervise them.

5. Animal Health Controls:

Egypt has no active equine disease surveillance mechanisms in place. There are no animal health procedures or precautions in place in respect of markets or gatherings of horses. There are no provisions for notification of an out-break of equine disease. In the opening meeting, the team was told that there was no West Nile fever in Egypt, but when meeting vets at a university they were told that, indeed, not only was West Nile fever present, it was of a completely different strain from that in neighbouring countries.

6. Import Controls:

The authorities in Egypt performed only ad hoc risk analysis for importation of live animals; specific criteria for entry, including testing for specific diseases of relevance or reports of refusal or acceptance of the animal, were unavailable. There is no standard import certificate and the official vet himself "indicated that due to the lack of clarity in their own animal health requirements they could not control the adequacy of the certificates accompanying the animals." The inspection team reported that they saw import documents for wild zebras from an African country, which cannot be considered free of African horse sickness, but the zebras had not undergone any quarantine or lab testing before entering Egypt.

7. Export to the EU:

According to the report, official export controls appear nearly non-existent. Quoting from the mission report, the concerned Egyptian authority "does not organise, regulate, check, or supervise the certification of



animal health requirements of the country of destination. In practice the mission team was informed that those animal health certificates were issued by non-official veterinarians, working for and on behalf of one of the unofficial self-regulating identification and registration bodies [i.e., EAO and EEF]. Underlying health and identity documentation from these two organisations was missing or inadequate. The mission team noted that the national animal health certificates seen at the airport quarantine department are in an

official pad and that the blank page forms had already been pre-stamped with an official stamp.

8 Control over Vet Medicinal Products: Currently performed unnecessary vaccinations for Venezuelan encephalomyelitis should not be allowed, as the vaccinated animals cannot be differentiated from infected animals.

EU OVERALL CONCLUSIONS:

"The lack of supervision and

documentation of official controls at all levels renders those controls unreliable. Confidence in the health status of equine animals is affected by shortcomings in the management of suspected and confirmed cases of disease in the country. Under current conditions, the certification of equidae does not meet the requirements of their entry to the EU.”

EGYPT’S RESPONSE:

To this report, Egypt officially responded in September and November 2010 (http://ec.europa.eu/food/fyo/ap/ep_eg2010-8427.pdf), and, in summary, replied that draft Ministerial Decisions regarding horse identification, registration and certification, disease notification, horse population, vaccination policy, and official vet certification are to be put before Parliament; the live horse import and export requirements and the administration of the Central Quarantine and Inspection Department will be updated. Vaccination for Venezuelan encephalomyelitides will cease immediately.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

STAKEHOLDERS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND NEEDS:

Egyptian Parliament

- New legislation conforming to the requirements for live horse exportation to EU as agreed in the 2001 EU – Egypt Association Agreement.

Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture

- Reorganise responsible departments to ensure full and proper documentation of horse health issues, horse importation and exportation.
- Train responsible Ministry personnel to apply standards, prepare proper documentation, undertake appropriate horse testing.
- Establish or refurbish an equine testing laboratory capable of undertaking horse testing.
- Control Health and Pre-Export Certification and Quarantine.
- Adopt and enforce horse disease surveillance and reporting.



Agricultural Organisation for Horses (EAO) & Egyptian Equestrian Federation (EEF)

- Provide horse population and identification information.
- Support the appropriate authorities in drafting required legislation.
- Advise on laboratory testing and standards.
- Seek authorisation to act in particular circumstances as recognised identification and registration authorities.
- Prepare an action plan to support the authorities’ efforts to address the issues raised by the FOV in order to lift the ban.

EGYPTIAN EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION POSITION:

According to Eng. Hesham Hattab, the President of the Egyptian Equestrian Federation, the EEF has been cooperating with the former Minister of Agriculture Mr. Amin Abaza and former Head of Central Department for Veterinary Quarantine, Dr. Mohamed El Garhi, to put back into working order the problem at hand, which resulted in several meetings leading to the establishment of a monitoring committee. As of January 25, 2011 and after the beginning of the Egyptian revolution, all

governmental and Ministry of Agriculture officials were changed and the committee came to a stop, and matters are still pending.

In view of on-going political situation in Egypt and in order to review the problem, the European Commission’s delegates along with the Ministry of Agriculture audited everything related to the country’s governing Veterinary Authorities and came up with recommendations to solve the problem. The main and sole stakeholder is the Ministry of Agriculture and the Veterinary Authorities. On the other hand, the EEF, as a governing body for equestrian sport, hosted and organised a seminar on June 4 2012 to create more awareness and enhance communication channels. Amongst the speakers were Dr. Yehia Ghazi, the Middle Eastern Representative of the World Organisation for Animal Health, Dr. Yousef Shalaby, current Head of Central Department for Veterinary Quarantine, Dr. Hatem Farag, assistant to the current Minister of Agriculture, and Dr. Sameeh Tarboosh of Jordan University of Science & Technology.

All photos courtesy of European Horse Services (EHS)