

The Epidemiological Situation of the Horse Stock in Serbia

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Serbian horse breeding looks back on a long-standing tradition, but it has not been saved from the stock reduction caused by motorisation and the changed way of life. This stock reduction was much more marked in plain areas where motorisation reached a higher level than in the mountains.

In 1991, there were 53,000 horses in Serbia, and 30,000 of these were broodmares, whereas by 2009 the number of horses went down to 14,000, and the number of broodmares to 5,000. 60% of the horses do not have specific breed characteristics, 20-30% of them are Serbian mountain horses, and 10% of them are half-bred, whereas the number of pure-bred horses is very small.

In the future, Serbia intends to further develop its horse breeding by improving equestrian sports and hippotherapy and also by producing horsemeat for human consumption. (There is an increasing demand for this on the world market.)

The continuous supervision of the horses' health, the early recognition and diagnosis of contagious diseases, the prevention of spreading of these diseases and compliance with the epidemiological measures taken for their eradication play an important role in the health preservation of the horse stock. The legal basis of the epidemiological measures is provided by the Law on Veterinary Medicine and the Law on Animal Welfare.

Implementation is ensured by the regulations based on the above laws, and also by the program of epidemiological measures prescribed for the year 2010. The regulations contain the rules concerning the epidemiological measures taken for the prevention and eradication of contagious diseases.

On the basis of the above-mentioned legal regulations, the horses are microchipped in compliance with the ISO 11784 or ISO 11785 standards. All horses have to be marked within six months after birth upon reporting by the owner or breeder. For sport horses, the age limit is one year. All data on the horses, owners, breeders, and also on the veterinarian institutions that perform the marking, are stored in the central database. The data are accessible for official animal health organisations and for other organisations authorised by the ministry.

The authorised animal health organisations also perform activities other than marking in horse farms: they supervise the animal health and animal welfare situation, as well as compliance with animal hygiene and epidemiological requirements.

The results of our serological examination performed in 2009 (using the virus neutralisation method) show very high seropositivity (82%) for equine herpes virus (EHV-1), and an even higher seropositivity (98%) for the H7N7 and H3N8 types of the equine influenza virus. This is the result of regular vaccination, and partly caused by the presence of the latent virus. We registered no clinical cases for these diseases.

Similarly, we did not register any clinical cases for equine viral arteritis (EVA), either, but 9% of the samples showed seropositivity (with the virus neutralization method). There is no vaccination for this disease in Serbia, and the positive findings probably came from imported horses, but the presence of the virus in the horse stock cannot be excluded, either.

No positive cases were found for glanders and dourine (with complement fixation assay). In 2009, tests for infectious anaemia in horses (AGID tests according to Coggins) gave one positive result.

The test for leptospirosis gave two positive results, which means 1.2% of samples examined with microscopic agglutination (*Leptospira bratislava*).

We are developing the animal health system in a way that it should assist the more accurate tracking of the movements of horses, resulting in a more favourable epidemiological situation in Serbia.

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