



Identification and registration (I&R) of equines in the Netherlands
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Introduction

Before explaining how the Netherlands has implemented EU-legislation for identification and registration of equines, I would like to introduce my organization, the Product Boards for Livestock, Meat and Eggs.

Product boards are typically Dutch organizations. A product board has legal authority; it may establish regulations or impose levies, but it is not a government agency. It works within and for its own sector, like the trade and industry, but is not really a sector organization either. A product board operates within the legal framework of a "statutory trade organization", which means it is an organization that is authorised by the government to formulate statutory rules in specific areas for a particular sector. Product boards refer to their organization as a vertical organization, by which they mean that they cover all trade and product activities within a given sector, from the farmyard right through to retail.

History of equines identification in the Netherlands

Many years before Commission Decision 93/623 made a uniform passport obligatory for registered equines born after 1998, the Royal Dutch hippic organization (KNHS) and some studbooks used already a horse passport.

Their common motive was, they wanted to be sure about the identity of a horse, whether the horse was meant for sport or for breeding purposes.

Based on their experience with the passport, these organizations concluded already in the 80's that to be 100% sure that a certain passport belongs to a certain horse, horses should be identified with a microchip. At that time microchip identification was still in a state of development.

Why identification and registration

The main aim of the first EU-legislation on identification and registration was to guarantee the identity of the horse in connection with sport or breeding purposes.

Commission Decision 2000/68/EC introduced a second reason, namely protection of public health (food safety), by compulsory administration of the medical treatments of an animal if it is intended to be slaughtered.

Organization of I&R

As in the other EU member states, in the Netherlands, the government is responsible for the national implementation of EU-legislation.

In 2003 the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture asked the Product Boards to establish the regulations for identification and registration of equines and to organise the execution of these regulations.

In cooperation with a delegation of the KNHS and the approved studbooks, which had already experience with identification and registration, the Product Boards have drawn up a "Regulation concerning identification and registration of equines 2004". This regulation has come into force since January 1st 2004 and refers to all equidae, that is to say to equines, donkey's, zebra's and crossbreds.

Parts of I&R

The I&R legislation for identification and registration consists the following main parts:

a) uniformed horse-passport

- each foal born after January 1st 2004 shall be identified with a horse-passport before the age of 7 months.
- since it was impossible to provide all equines at the same time with a horse-passport, a certain transition period was allowed for older animals.
- foals from foreign studbooks, born in the Netherlands must be provided with a passport issued by one of the Dutch approved passport issuing organizations.

Foreign studbooks are not allowed to issue passport for horses in the Netherlands.

- horses imported from countries outside the EU must be provided with a passport the day they are imported.
- Only the KNHS and the approved studbooks are allowed to issue horse-passports. The Product Boards have authorised these 29 organizations, on strict conditions, to issue horse-passports.
- the passport consists a part that has to be filled in obligatory and a part that can be filled in voluntary.

The obligatory part has to contain the information EU-legislation requires and in the voluntary part complementary breeding and sport information can be written down.

In this way only one document consist all the necessary information.

- a passport has to be a unique document that is issued once only. To prevent fraud, each page of the passport is printed with an ultraviolet mark, which cannot be copied.
- since the main aim of the introduction of the horse-passport is food safety, the owner of the horse, has to write down the final destination of the horse (intended for slaughter or not) at the latest when the animal needs a medical treatment for the first time.
- In this case veterinarians have to indicate the medical treatments of the horse in the passport.

b) unique lifetime number (UELN)

- when a horse is registered and a passport will be issued, it has to be identified with the 15-digit unique lifetime number. The first 3 digits indicate the country code (528 for the Netherlands); the second 3 digits indicate the number of the passport-issuing organization.
- passport issuing organizations register their horses in their administration with this individual number. The last 9 digits of the UELN are used to indicate the year of birth and other characteristics. Since the passports are being issued by different organizations and not by one central organization, the identification with the UELN has to be used by all member states, otherwise unicuity can never be guaranteed. The chip number cannot be used for this purpose.
- the UELN number has to be printed in the passport.

c) microchip

- since the destination of the horse and the medical treatments are written down in the passport, one has to be 100% sure that a certain passport belongs to a certain horse. Therefore all horses must be identified with a microchip.

Without a microchip it is not possible to receive a passport for a horse, so a foal has to be identified with a microchip before the age of 7 months.

- Horses imported from countries outside the EU must be identified with a microchip the day they are imported.

Horses imported from other EU member-states must be identified with a microchip within 6 month after the date of entrance.

- A microchip connects in a unique way, the passport with the horse. Control of the identification can take place very simple at every place and at any moment by reading the microchip number. Other methods like DNA-typing and retina scan are for several reasons less suitable then the microchip.
- The KNHS and some studbooks experienced successfully the identification with the microchip already for a number of years.
- the 15-digit microchip number is registered in the passport, in the database of the organization issuing the passport and in a central database.
- quality demands of the micro-chips are:
 - the microchips have to comply with the standards ISO 11784 and 11785.
 - the first 3 digits of the microchip number have to indicate the country where the horse is identified.
 - only veterinarians and well-trained horse-identification specialists are allowed to inject microchips.
- there are a few horse owners that have conscientious objections against identification with a microchip. These persons are allowed not to identify the horse with a microchip, but they have to let determine the DNA-type of the horse.

d) central database

- at least once a month all passport-issuing organizations have to send the microchip number and the lifetime number of all horses they registered to a databank at the Product Boards.
- with a public central search-facility on the web, it is possible to find with the help of the microchip number the passport-issuing organization that registered the horse. This organization disposes of more detailed information about the horse.

Inspection and control

It is important to organise inspection and control in an effective way to guarantee a reliable system of identification and registration of equines.

In the Netherlands there are different stages of control:

- The General Inspection Service of the Ministry of Agriculture controls on farms, livestock markets and transports.
- The Inspection Service for Livestock and Meat is in charge of control at slaughterhouses, livestock markets as well and border stations in case of export or import of equines.

Final recommendations and remarks

Based on the experience the following remarks could be made:

- Most member-states don't have implemented the current EU-legislation on identification and registration. This has to be first priority, since harmonization between member-states is absolutely necessary.
Introducing a smart card in complement of a passport does harm to the introduction of the passport as such. It should be introduced only after the identification with a passport has become common sense.
- In the current EU-legislation breeding and identification instructions are not separated, which can be confusing sometimes.
Fortunately a Commission Regulation is in preparation, establishing all instructions about horse identification only. The sooner this document is completed, the better.
- When horses are identified with a microchip, the outline diagram in the passport is no longer needed and should no longer be obligatory sketched in the passport. Since

almost half of the horse population in the Netherlands is of a one-colour race, the diagram is not useful for identification purpose.