IDENTIFICATION OF HORSES IN GREAT BRITAIN.

In Great Britain we now have legislation that requires all equines to have a passport. The legislation also states the circumstances when a passport must be available for inspection. We have tried to strike a balance between implementing the EU legislation and to have working practices that are not be too onerous on the equine industry. It has not always been easy to get that balance right. We are focusing enforcement activity primarily – but not exclusively – on horses and ponies that are exported and those slaughtered for later entry into the human food chain.

In Great Britain, the government only became involved in horse identification when the European Commission introduced legislation in 1993 requiring registered (or pedigree) horses to be registered. Prior to this, individual horse organisations had their own procedures and rules for the identification of horses and ponies registered with them. The subsequent requirement for individual identification of all horses caused particular problems and challenges for us because –

❖ We have many native breeds of ponies in Great Britain – such as the Dartmoor and New forest pony. We wanted to make sure that we did not do anything that would threaten the survival or long term viability of these breeds.

❖ There has been a lively discussion in Great Britain about whether the completion of the silhouette is really an effective method of identification in this technology age. It is certainly sometimes difficult to produce an effective silhouette for some native ponies. We realise the benefits to effective identification that microchipping can provide, but we consider that an assessment of both the practical and economic impact needs to be made.

❖ Because we don't have a culture of eating horse meat in this country, and we have only a small trade in the export of dead horse meat, it has been difficult for many horse owners to identify with the principle objective of the legislation. To overcome this we have tried to explain the other benefits of passports to horse owners such as the continued availability of veterinary

medicines for horses not intended for human consumption. There is some indication that this message is finally getting understood.

❖   The number and diversity of organisations that we have authorised to issue horse passports presents problems in trying to raise standards and get them to co operate with each other. We have made some progress on this and have produced some draft rules to help us assess whether they are operating efficiently, but this is an area that is likely to remain challenging in the future.

These then have been some of the changes that we have had to face. However, one positive outcome of horse passports has been the decision to established a **National Equine Database,** based on information supplied by passport issuing organisations. This is a joint industry and government database. We think that it represents a good example of industry and government working together for the common good.

The National Equine Database will be a unique database containable valuable information about every horse in the UK with a passport. It will be used by the government to help to check compliance with the horse passport requirements, and for disease control and surveillance purposes. It will also give government more information about the size and location of horses in Great Britain.

Horse owners or prospective owners will, for a fee, be able to search the database before buying or selling a horse, or to research breeding and competition information relating to a particular horse. Information on breeding and performance will be provided to the database on a voluntary basis by the industry. The extent to which equine organisations agree to supply this information will be crucial for the successful operation of this part of the database. The government has agreed to fund the setting up of the National Equine Database for two years, but after that date the breeding and performance aspects of the database will need to be self funding.

The National Equine Database already contains details of nearly 600,000 passports that have been issued to date. At the moment quality checks of this data are being carried out and we hope that the database will be fully operational during 2005. The increasing use of microchipping of horses as well as the uniform adoption of the

system of a Unique Equine Life Number for al equines will, we hope, add significantly to the effectiveness of the database. Further information about the National Equine Database can be found at [www.ned.uk.com]

I am grateful for this opportunity to briefly explain the approach to identification of horses in Great Britain.

- GB legislation requires all equines to have a passport

- Legislation states the circumstances when the passport must be available for inspection

- Enforcement activity is focused on export or slaughter for export.

- Legislation requiring passports for all horses presented some challenges because
    - GB has many native breeds some of which are low value horses and ponies
    - Questions about the effectiveness of the silhouette as a means of identification
    - We do not have a culture of eating horse meat in GB

defra
Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

- **National Equine Database (NED)**

  - Based on information supplied by Passport Issuing Organisations

  - NED will be unique, contain valuable information about every horse is the UK with a passport

- NED will be used by the Government to –

    - Check compliance with the Horse Passport requirements

    - Provide information on the size and location of horses in Great Britain

    - Horse owners or prospective owners will have access to parts of NED for a fee

- Lastly, the National Equine Database, a good example of industry and Government working together for the common good

  - Contains details of over 600,000 horse passport issued to date

  - We expect NED to be fully operational during 2005

defra

- The increasing use of the microchip and the uniform adoption of a Unique Equine Life Number (UELN) for all equines will add to the effectiveness of the database

- Further information about the National Equine Database can be found at http://www.ned.uk.com

defra
Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs