

Identification of Horses in Ireland

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Introduction

In recent times there has been an increased awareness of the importance of adequate identification and tracking of farm animals, including equines. This increased awareness has been fuelled by fears regarding the safety of meat for human consumption and the control and containment of diseases.

In Ireland, new legislation (Statutory Instrument No. 399 of 2004) regarding the registration of equidae was introduced by the Department of Agriculture & Food on the 4th of October 2004 to implement EU decision 2000/68. Under this new legislation all equidae are required to be accompanied by an identification document when being moved out of a holding. Since the 1st January 2005 all equidae being presented for slaughter for human consumption must be accompanied by their identification document, which was issued six months before being presented for slaughter.

The aim of this paper is to provide a summary of the identification of equines in Ireland.

Materials and methods

Statistics and relevant information were obtained from the three main registration authorities responsible for the issuing of identification documents for horses in Ireland, the Irish Horse Register, Weatherbys Ireland and the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society.

Results and discussion

Registration Authorities

There are three main approved registration authorities responsible for the registration of horses in Ireland, the Irish Horse Register, Weatherbys Ireland and the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society. Between these three organisations the bulk of equine identification documents are issued. There are also a number of associations who are approved as registration authorities and issue a small number of identification documents for equines (Irish Pony Society, Irish Piebald and Skewbald Society, Irish Cob Society). Each registration authority maintains its own database. There are no links between databases at present.

1. The Irish Horse Register

The Irish Horse Board and the Northern Ireland Horse Board maintain the Irish Horse Register. The register incorporates the Irish Sport Horse Studbook and the Irish Draught Horse Studbook.

The core breeds of that make up the Irish Sport Horse are the Irish Draught and Thoroughbred. Other breeds such as the Connemara Pony and Continental Warmbloods are also accepted. Equines with no known breeding are incorporated into a supplementary section of the Irish Sport Horse Studbook.

The Irish Draught Horse Studbook consists of Irish Draught Horses that have been inspected and approved by the Irish Draught Horse Society. Mares are inspected at a minimum of 2 years of age and stallions from the age of 3.

2. Weatherbys Ireland

Weatherbys Ireland maintains the Thoroughbred Studbook in Ireland. They also run a registrar of non-Thoroughbred horses.

3. Connemara Pony Breeders' Society

The Connemara Pony Breeders' Society maintains the Connemara Pony Studbook. Stallions, mares and geldings are inspected at a minimum of 2 years of age for classification in the Studbook.

Microchipping and Pedigree Verification

A veterinary surgeon is used to insert microchips and to take markings.

All foals registered in the Irish Horse Register have been micro-chipped and had their pedigree verified through DNA analysis since 2001.

All foals registered with Weatherbys Ireland have been micro-chipped since 1986. Blood typing in order to verify parentage was carried out between 1986 and 1999. From 2000 onwards all foals have been DNA typed.

All foals in the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society have been blood typed since 1991. Starting this year all foals will be microchipped.

UELN

The Irish Horse Register, Weatherbys Ireland and the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society use the UELN as their registration number.

The first three digits of the UELN for the Irish Horse Register are '372', the code for Ireland, followed by '414' the code for Irish Horse Register.

The first three digits of the UELN for Weatherbys Ireland are '273', followed by 'IRE', indicating that the foal was born in Ireland. The last character in the UELN is 'T', coding for Thoroughbred.

The UELN will be used for the first time by the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society this year. The first three digits of the UELN for the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society are '372', the code for Ireland, followed by '004' the code for Connemara Pony.

Covering Certificates

In the Irish Horse Register, Weatherbys Ireland and the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society a covering certificate from the stallion owner is required for parentage recording.

Prefixes

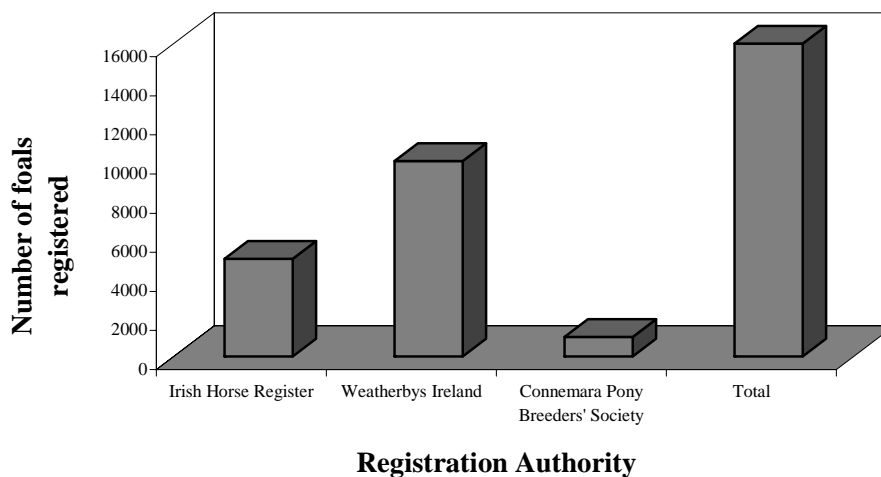
The Irish Horse Register and the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society allow owners to register a prefix. When a prefix is registered the owner can name the animal as a foal. This name can never be changed unless the prefix owner gives his/her permission. Owners cannot register prefixes with Weatherbys Ireland.

Branding

Branding is not used in any of the Studbooks in Ireland as a method of identification.

Number of foals registered

Approximately 5,000 foals are registered with the Irish Horse Register per year. Weatherbys Ireland register approximately 10,000 foals per annum. The Connemara Pony Breeders' Society register roughly 1,000 foals per year.



Graph 1 The number of foals registered in Ireland per year

Conclusion

At present there are approximately 16,000 foals registered per year in Ireland. In recent years the identification of equines has become more regulated with the main registration authorities having introduced DNA analysis and microchipping. With the introduction of new legislation regarding the registration of equidae, by the Department of Agriculture and Food in Ireland, the number of equines issued with identification documents is likely to increase in the coming years.

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