

**SPORTHORSE**  
Welfare Foundation



## **Sporthorse Welfare Foundation Calls for improved education and welfare charter**

BY [HELEN STOCK](#) ON 28 NOVEMBER 2023

In the wake of numerous stories hitting the mainstream press speculating on the appropriate way to manage horses – and amidst claims that the general public is often ignorant about essential horse welfare issues – an extensive scientific study which examines the key priorities regarding sporthorse welfare has been conducted by the Sporthorse Welfare Foundation (SWF).

The research has resulted in experts calling for more education and research to support riders, trainers and federations, in addition to the rollout of a welfare charter and approved guidelines to not only ensure the wellbeing of sports horses but to also safeguard the future of equestrian sports.

Experts involved in international and national horse sports across a range of Olympic disciplines were consulted (using the Delphi technique) 1 in a study which took into consideration the views of 104 active equestrian professionals spanning 24 different countries.

The panel agreed that the following aspects of equine management were essential to maintain horse health and welfare:

- Training management
- Competition management
- Young horse management
- Health status and veterinary management
- Horse-human relations

However, the study failed to reach consensus on the matter of stable and environmental management, and welfare assessment as fundamental priorities for sporthorse health and welfare, with the majority of participants of the opinion that these aspects were already being well managed within the international horse community.

On the back of this first tranche of research, the experts involved have called for improved education and research and a dedicated welfare charter to inform those involved in equestrian management practices. It was also agreed that a universally agreed set of guidelines would also help to establish a social license to operate (SLO) for anyone involved in equestrianism.

The research is the first of its kind and was funded by the following equestrian federations and organisations: European Equestrian Federation, World Horse Welfare, Dutch Equestrian Federation, Belgian Equestrian Federation, Swiss Equestrian Federation, French Equestrian Federation, German Equestrian Federation, British Equestrian Federation, the International Dressage Riders and Trainers' Club, the Sport Horse Research Foundation and Hartpury University.

The Sporthorse Welfare Foundation's next steps will be to evaluate the opinions of other (non-elite) equestrians and the wider public on the results to date to identify and prioritise areas for further investigation. SWF will also collate evidence to understand what practices/management are being implemented across different countries, disciplines, competitions, and individuals. By increased monitoring, record keeping, and research, good practice can be identified and showcased to the wider equestrian communities and the public to establish a culture in which the quality of life for sporthorses is always the priority.

Finally, the SWF intends to work with national and international federations to provide targeted education and guidance, policy development, and regulation to improve the management of sporthorse health and the understanding of best welfare practices.

Commenting on the study, equine scientist, President of the National Equine Welfare Council (UK) and founder member and current President of the Sport Horse Welfare Foundation, Dr David Marlin said: "This research is an important milestone for international equine welfare, providing an essential building block in the journey towards agreeing a universally accepted code of practice to ensure the health and wellbeing of horses all over the world. We look forward to sharing the next stage of research and moving closer to achieving our goal of establishing a benchmark for welfare excellence across all equestrian disciplines."

*1. The Delphi method or Delphi technique is a structured communication technique or method, originally developed as a systematic, interactive forecasting method which relies on a panel of experts*

**– Ends –**

## **Note to Editors**

### About the Sporthorse Welfare Foundation

The Sporthorse Welfare Foundation (SWF) is a unique collaboration of international researchers, practitioners and organisations who have come together in a not-for-profit member organisation, which aims to support sport horse health and welfare through innovative research and education. The SWF's goal is to work with the equine industry to undertake studies that generate data that can support evidence-informed approaches to sport horse management and training. The SWF commits to sharing this information freely across all levels of the equestrian

industry from horse owners and keepers, to riders and coaches, to veterinary and supporting paraprofessionals, and including equestrian federations and regulatory bodies, for the benefit of the horse. The founding members of the SWF are: Dr Jane Williams, Dr Carolien Munsters, Dr David Marlin, Dr Hayley Randle, Dr Michael Weishaupt, Dr Lars Roepstorff, Dr Hilary Clayton, Dr Lise Berg, Dr Katharina Kirsch and Dr Marianne Sloet. Further information about the Sporthorse Welfare

Foundation can be found

at [www.sporthorsewelfarefoundation.com](http://www.sporthorsewelfarefoundation.com) and <https://www.facebook.com/sporthorsewelfarefoundation>

## **Funding**

Funding organisations had no role in the design of the study; in the analysis, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results. Allocated representatives of the funders participated in the Delphi study; however, these roles were not directly involved with the allocation of funding and individual participants acted in an independent manner.