

Ethical Reflections on the Dignity and Welfare of Horses and other Equids

*A scientific and legal approach
and...
some perspectives !*

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(presenting for COFICHEV – The Swiss Horse Industry Council and Observatory)

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1. Introduction




Réflexions éthiques sur la dignité et le bien-être
des chevaux et autres équidés
Pistes pour une meilleure protection


**Ethical Reflections on the Dignity and Welfare of
Horses and other Equids**
Pathways to Enhanced Protection

Summary Report (2022)

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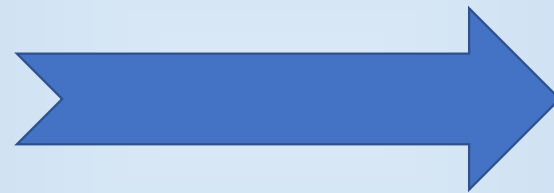
2. A Paradygm Shift (1)



Military



Agricultural work



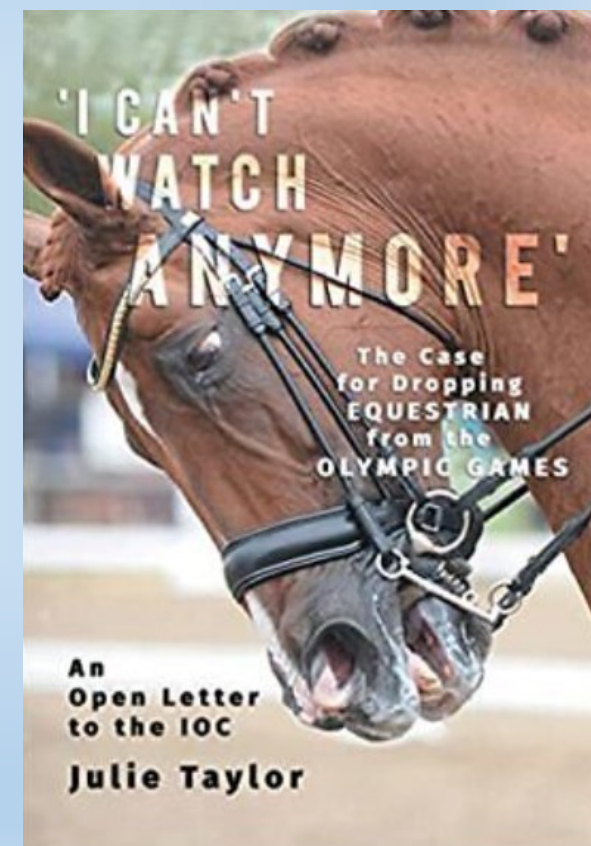
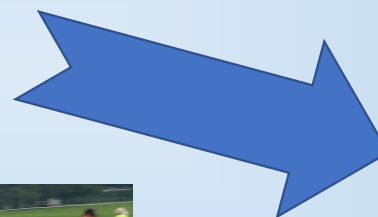
Feminisation of equestrian activities



Leisure riding

2. A Paradygm Shift (2)

Social License to Operate (SLO) ?



2. A Paradygm Shift (3)

Approach from two different angles

Ethic of Responsibility

Care and subsistence

Weighing of Interest
(equids and people)

Minimal Strain and
Justification



Ethic of Conviction

No gap between humans
and animals

Abolition of all forms of use
of living beings

Little or no Concern for the
consequences of such a
systematic position

2. A Paradygm Shift (4)

Statement of COFICHEV: Principle of Personal Responsibility towards the Horse

From an ethical point of view:

1. COFICHEV defends the possibility of employing equids, provided that certain imperatives are respected,
2. Only overriding interests can justify the strains,
3. The day-to-day conditions of management (keeping), work and transport, as well as end-of-life decisions, must respect essential welfare standards based on scientific studies.

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3. Ethics - Equine Welfare – The Five Freedoms (1)

Ethics refers to a practical and normative philosophical discipline that indicates in a structured, yet value-questioning system how human beings should best behave towards each other and their surroundings.

This approach therefore consists of methodical deliberation over the question of what is right and just. The Swiss Animal Welfare Act (Art. 3 AniWA) defines the terms dignity, strains and welfare. Our discussion is based on these concepts and their interpretation.

3. Ethics - Equine Welfare – The Five Freedoms (2)

Affective state: no pain and suffering, positive emotions...

Health and functioning: no illnesses and injuries, safety, food, water...



Normal behaviour: movement, social interactions, exploration, adaptation...

Source: Farm Animal Welfare Council

3. Ethics – Equine Welfare - The Five Freedoms (3)

1. The animal has access to water and food in quantities appropriate to their species,
2. Their management conditions must not cause them any psychological suffering (fear, distress, etc.),
3. They must have a certain degree of physical comfort,
4. They must not be subjected to any ill-treatment that could cause pain or injury and they must receive treatment in the event of illness,
5. They must be able to live in an environment appropriate to their species.

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4.1 Definition of Dignity – Würde – dignité



According to the AniWA, **dignity** is each animal's inherent worth that humans must uphold in their relationships with that animal.

This means that we must respect each animal for himself or herself (including individual particularities, behaviours and preferences). We must therefore take that unique worth into account and hold each animal in high moral regard, independent of our own impressions, opinions and experiences. As such, animals' inherent worth should not be tied to their instrumental usefulness, nor to their sentimental, heritage or market value.

4.2 Definition of Strain – **Belastung** – contrainte



Strain is a physical or psychological action by a human being to impose a benefit.

The definition also covers the negative consequences of such actions.

Strain always affects dignity. Dignity is only comprised, however, if overriding interests cannot justify it.

4.3 Definition of Pain, Suffering and Harm – **Schmerz,** **Leiden und Schaden** – **douleur, maux et dommages**

Pain is characterised by an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with real or suspected tissue damage (lameness, colic).

Suffering is expressed through abnormal behaviour and body language (facial expressions, ear position, postures, etc.).

Harm is manifested by loss of functionality or behavioural disorders, such as limited responsiveness to stimuli.

4.4 Definition of Anxiety – **Verängstigung** - **anxiété**



Anxiety is also part of the negative emotions group.

Whether sporadic or long-lasting, **anxiety** is characterised by a state of alertness, a disorganisation of self-control, and a decrease in the ability to adapt to variations in the environment.

Anxiety can manifest as a sudden – sometimes brutal and dangerous – fear response during new or unexpected situations for the horse.

4.5 Definition of Shying, Fear and Phobia – **Furcht, Angst** **und Phobie** – crainte, peur et phobie

Shying occurs when horses confront something unknown to them. They back away, snort and then begin to explore.

Fear is an instantaneous and more intense emotion felt in the presence of an object, or event, detected or perceived as a danger or threat.

Phobia is different from shying and fear in that it always occurs disproportionately and in anticipation, when the horse has not had sufficient habituation to control any natural responses to the trigger.

4.6 Definition of Humiliation – **Erniedrigung** - avilissement

Humiliation occurs when the situation meets any one of the following criteria:

The animal is mechanised and used only as a machine.

He or she is ridiculed, represented like a lifeless thing or an object, or subjected to measures that totally remove all sense of control.



4.7 Definition of an intervention which profoundly alters the appearance or abilities – **Phänotyp oder Fähigkeiten** - **phénotype ou capacités**

An intervention profoundly alters the appearance or abilities of an animal when it leads to a loss of functionality or to an intense loss of abilities.

Excessive objectification, or instrumentalization, is a strain arising from the practice of turning equids into mere devices at the hands of humans, without any sensitivity to their specific needs or to their physical and psychological interests.



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5.1 General Ethical Issues – Thought processes (1)



Several strains result directly from the domestication process of the equid species.

In return, equids enjoy a number of benefits: food security, safety and protection from predators, shelter and healthcare.

The process of domestication has not changed the original behaviour and natural needs of the horses.

5.1 General Ethical Issues – Thought processes (2)



Horses and equestrian activities have attracted young women from both urban and rural backgrounds.

This gender makes up 67.8% of equid owners in Switzerland.

Such an orientation has positively correlated with concerns for animal dignity and welfare.

That said, the legislative system imposes standards that are based on minimal agreements.

5.2 General Ethical Issues – The Field of tension between Livestock and Companion Animals (1)



The proportion of horses considered as companion animals is constantly increasing.

Livestock animals are likened to a kind of living machine under aggressive human control in their role of transforming nutrients into goods and services.

Despite good intentions, qualifying horses as companion animals carries its own share of risks. It can lead to exaggerated care (coat clipping, blanketing, industrial food, supplements, obesity...) and to a level of anthropomorphism that demeans animal nature.

5.2 General Ethical Issues – The Field of tension between Livestock and Companion Animals (2)



This new hierarchy of categories of equids aims to grant the companion animals a superior and protected dignity by excluding them from the food market.

The promotion of their role as companions for human beings could lead the public to believe that underworking them or not working them at all represents an ideal.

Such a development could drive equids out of agriculture and into the realm of luxury entertainment.

5.3 General Ethical Issues – Equid Management (1)



The living conditions of equids represent one of today's most debated issues. Most domestic horses live in very controlled environments.

Individual box stalls remain the most common traditional housing mode, although group management has increased significantly in recent years.

However, responsible and appropriate husbandry and employment depends on the facilities.

5.3 General Ethical Issues – Equid Management (2)

On the one hand, animal protection legislation mandates a number of structures and practices that are very difficult to achieve in rural areas.

On the other hand, society demands extensive space (stables, paddocks, pastures, etc.) for managing equids.

Finally, keeping equids on lands zoned for construction remains difficult due to the high value of the land.



5.4 General Ethical Issues – Equid in Sport (1)



Equestrian practices thus entail risks that expose equine athletes to physical and psychological harm, strains which play a significant role in career interruptions and terminations.

The early training of horses is still a subject of discussion.

National and International Federations have rules designed to ensure the welfare of the horse in competition.

The answer to these welfare issues lies nonetheless in the knowledge provided by scientific research and transmitted to the greatest number of people.

5.4 General Ethical Issues – Equid in Sport (2)



The strains generated by stressful situations in sports activities and health disorders raise concerns among the public, the media, veterinarians and ethologists.

In summary, sport-related strains affect several vital systems. These include pathologies of the limbs, the back and the muscles; digestive system disorders (colic, metabolic issues, gastric ulcers), respiratory diseases, anxiety and fear reactions, thermoregulatory problems, overtraining, overuse and overwork.

5.4 General Ethical Issues – Equid in Sport (3)

In the future, federations will face the major challenge of developing educational and public relations concepts to raise awareness about the welfare and dignity of equids.

Furthermore, they will have to encourage a paradigm shift and a change in the scale of values in any interactions with equids.



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6. Perspectives and Conclusions (1)



Equids – horses, ponies, donkeys, and hybrids – are now perceived in a very different way than they used to be.

In their lifestyles (leisure, sport, tourism, media, technology, etc.), humans maintain a relationship with them that is quite different from what they develop with most animals. They now consider them as partners or companions, but also appreciate them for their athletic qualities or their work.

These roles mark the various ways in which the two species interact.

6. Perspectives and Conclusions (2)



The issue of implementing welfare measures and respecting the inherent value of equids is of paramount importance.

The primary responsibility for limiting strains lies with the people working in the various fields of the industry (breeding, management, disciplines, daily care, therapies, etc.)

Knowledge must be made available, distributed, acquired, and applied. For this reason, the players in the horse industry have a key role to play in training their members, who are generally unable to take on their obligations if they do not have the appropriate skills.

6. Perspectives and Conclusions (3)



Our report shows that the knowledge necessary for the development of an adequate ethical attitude is lacking in several areas at present.

We therefore recommend that the scientists of the equine research network address an increasing number of fundamental and practical issues in the future.

The legislative authorities must continue their efforts to improve equine welfare and respect for their dignity, especially in their work or purpose.

6. Perspectives and Conclusions (4)



By funding projects, they must encourage the industry to reflect on ethical issues and help it make decisions and communicate. In this respect, our report emphasises the overriding importance of scientific findings.

They should prevail over judgements based on assumptions, emotions or references to any kind of utopic nature. To clarify what is still to come, we conclude that the current context already contains the main elements that will guide the paths that should be followed.

6. Perspectives and Conclusions (5)



It is reasonable to assume that the public will continue to express strong and legitimate expectations of the equine industry. In view of the regular questioning of sporting behaviour and of management systems, and the controversy surrounding certain practices, we consider it necessary to not leave the duty of vigilance solely to animal protection movements or to the authorities responsible for enforcing the legislation.

If the industry is to retain its social legitimacy, people working with horses and organisations must prevent problems in the first place and periodically carry out an honest weighing of interests.

6. Perspectives and Conclusions (6)

More specifically, they must give top priority to the welfare of the equids and respect for their inherent worth and their subjectivity and not just focus on improving these points for the benefit of human beings.

We therefore consider that an independent and permanent think tank commission dedicated to ethics in the equine industry be set up and financed by the structures concerned.



Take Home Message

1. As you can see and realise, it is ten to twelve for the equine sector,
2. We must educate, educate and educate again, especially the younger generation,
3. We should behave with actions based only on scientifically proven and verified facts.



Thank you very much for your attention



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