

Press Release

Advancing Agriculture, Arts, Industry, and Science



RDS

For Immediate Release

ICBF Irish Draught Horse Conservation Report

At the RDS today, Dr Francis Kearney, Irish Cattle Breeders Federation presented final findings of the ICBF Irish Draught Horse Conservation Report which was funded by the RDS. The main findings include;

- The Irish Draught Horse breed, despite the utilisation of significant resources, suffers from the lack of a sustainable breed development programme that is aimed at both genetic improvement, and at the safeguarding of genetic diversity within the breed.
- The lack of planning is manifested by the fact that there are no clearly set out breeding objectives by either of the organisations who approve animals for breeding purposes, namely, the Irish Draught Horse Society, and the Irish Horse Board. The lack of breeding objectives undermines the ability of a quality control system such as mare or stallion inspections to play a meaningful role in breed development.
- Initial results from the RDS-funded University of Limerick study into "Irish Draught Conformation" suggests there is no consistency in the evaluation methods used currently for either Irish Draught Mares or Stallion approvals. (The view of individual inspectors as to what an Irish Draught is and the attributes it requires for future function differs greatly).
- There is no question as to the expertise of the judges used by the Irish Draught Society or the Irish Horse Board, however the current trait based system allows for widely inconsistent results between judges on an individual animal.
- The current licensing of Irish Draught Stallions for both the Irish Draught Studbook and the Irish Sport Horse Studbook does not explicitly favour the retention of individual breed characteristics and a separate identity for the Irish Draught. No research or planning has been carried out on the long term consequences of this system for either the Irish Draught or the Irish Sport Horse.
- The development of a sustainable breeding programme for the Irish Draught needs to be built around three components:
 1. The definition of a breeding objective
 2. Evaluation of an animal's ability to fulfil that breeding objective
 3. Design and implementation of a sustainable breeding programme to ensure the best animals are used to attain a given objective.

The recommendation of both the RDS/ICBF is that attention should be focused in the short term in storing genetic material that will safeguard genetic and breed characteristic erosion until such time as it can be used as part of a properly constructed breed development programme. In addition, other aspects that can ensure an increase in genetic diversity should be examined.

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