

VETERINARY IRELAND MEDIA RELEASE

SPECIALIST EQUINE VETS CONVENE IN KILKENNY FOR SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

Horses have been an important part of Ireland's social and economic fabric for centuries and they support thousands of jobs across the country, both directly and indirectly, including throughout rural Ireland.

The point was highlighted at the *Irish Equine Veterinary Conference* hosted by Veterinary Ireland and taking place at Lyrath Estate, Kilkenny. Opened by the Mayor of Kilkenny, Cllr. Andrew McGuinness, it featured international, national and local speakers. The main conference on Friday 7th and Saturday 8th November 2014; was preceded by a 'wetlab' on the afternoon of Thursday 6th November at the superb facilities in Ballylinch Stud in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.

Speaking at the conference, Don Collins, Chair of the Veterinary Ireland Equine Group, said that three sectors are supported by horses – racing, breeding and equestrian sports. He outlined that an estimated 72,000 tourists engage in equestrian pursuits here every year, worth approximately €80m to the Irish economy. The Irish Sport Horse Industry involves approximately 124,000 sport horses and is estimated to be worth in excess of €708m per annum to the economy, employing over 12,500 people full time but with 29,295 individuals deriving all or part of their income from the sector. (Ref 1)

"Ireland is one of the top four breeders of thoroughbreds in the world with horses exported to approximately 40 countries, based on our reputation for high calibre horses," said Mr. Collins. "This annual conference offers a variety of diverse practical workshops and scientific presentations to help specialist equine vets to upskill and continue to provide up to date and state of the art clinical advice to their clients in this important sector."

Speaking in Kilkenny, Dr. Vivienne Duggan, President of Veterinary Ireland called for private veterinary practitioners to be granted access to the central database for horses - including information about the person responsible for the horse and the status of the horse with regard to food production.

"This will allow veterinary practitioners to ensure that they are using the most appropriate medicines both for optimum clinical effect and in line with the current legislation in equine veterinary work, which will become increasingly important as the equine sector continues to recover economically and to support its positive expansion in the future." said Dr. Duggan.

UNDERSTANDING THE GENETIC ARCHITECTURE OF HEALTH TRAITS

A cutting edge presentation on *Genetics and its Applications for the Horse Industry* was delivered by Dr Emmeline Hill from UCD's School of Agriculture & Food Science. Dr. Hill said that the sequencing of the horse genome and the development of advanced genomic tools have provided the opportunity to evaluate genetic contributions to health and performance traits in the horse in a significant way.



“Selection for athletic performance during the 300+ year development of the thoroughbred has resulted in high frequencies of gene variants that contribute to elite physiological performance,” said Dr. Hill. “The gene variants that contribute to both advantages and poor performance traits segregate in the population and result in individual differences, despite similar pedigree backgrounds. It has long been accepted that there are genetic contributions to elite racing performance and to a range of health traits.”

Dr. Hill explained that understanding the genetic architecture of these health traits will assist in the improved management and welfare of the horse. “Novel genetic tests have recently been introduced in the global thoroughbred breeding and racing industries and are being applied at various stages of the life cycle of the horse to provide additional evidence based scientific information to inform selection, breeding, training and racing decisions,” said Dr. Hill.

HORSE WELFARE

Kilkenny was well represented in the proceedings with the conference officially opened by the Mayor of Kilkenny, Cllr. Andrew McGuinness. Local speakers included equine specialist Dr. Joe Collins and vet Tim Brennan from Gowran.

In a presentation about Horse Welfare, Equine specialist Dr. Joe Collins, originally from Kilkenny, shared his experiences and learnings of a voluntary trip to North Africa.

Dr. Collins spent three weeks at an equine veterinary hospital in the Nile Valley in March 2014 run by Animal Care Egypt (ACE). “ACE welcomes vets, vet nurses and vet students on visits and volunteering and I thoroughly recommend the experience as broadening our view of equine veterinary medicine,” said Dr. Collins.

“The patients were largely working equids, including more donkeys than horses - not pets, competition animals or companions. We performed multiple surgeries and treatments at little or no cost to the animal owners. However the cost to ACE was often a significant determiner of what treatment was provided.”

Describing the facilities as quite sophisticated, Dr. Collins said that challenges included supply chain or poor technical support for equipment maintenance. “The cultural context is everything and we can't necessarily transfer our standards and systems to other cultures or shouldn't believe that what we do is necessarily right – there can be many ways to achieve results and sometimes we need to travel to explore the possibilities,” said Dr. Collins. His visit was supported by the BEVA Trust, Curragh Veterinary Supplies and Dundalk IT.

IRISH SPEAKERS

Vet Tim Brennan from Gowran, Co. Kilkenny led a ‘how to’ presentation on Embryo Transfer. “Although Embryo Transfers have been performed for over 20 years, success rates are at about 50%,” said Mr. Brennan. The Donor mare is usually a valuable broodmare and the Recipient is synchronised in her reproductive cycle.

Mr. Brennan’s presentations tackled the practical obstacles to successful embryo transfer and highlighted technical advances including oocyte aspiration, in vitro fertilization and the more successful transporting and freezing of embryos.



Vets Tom O'Brien and Shane Guerin delivered presentations on managing colic and MRSA in veterinary practice respectively, while Mary Goodman offered advice on retirement planning for vets.

The Michael Osborne Lecture 2014 was delivered by Harry Sweeney and the 3rd annual Peter Gibbons Memorial Lecture was delivered by Ger Kelly.

PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS AND LECTURES BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS

International speakers included **John Newcombe** B Vet Med MRCVS, one of Britain's most prominent equine stud vets who works almost exclusively on the equine reproduction side at Warren House Veterinary Centre, West Midlands. He has published over 50 peer reviewed scientific papers and has a special interest in Embryo Transfer.

He delivered a number of workshops and presentations in areas related to breeding including embryonic loss, uterine health, anovulatory follicles/Doppler assessment and timing of ovulation,

Jim Schumacher DVSM MS DACVS travelled from the University of Tennessee, USA, where he is Professor at the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences in the College of Veterinary Medicine. With a strong background in large animal surgery, his research interests are equine respiratory and reproductive surgery and lameness.

He delivered a number of surgery related workshops and presentations, including non-laparoscopic cryptorchidectomy, centenses of synovial spaces and peripheral nerve blocks, advances in reproductive surgery, surgery of the penis and posterior proximal suspensory desmitis.

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Ref 1: Economic Contribution of the Sport Horse Industry to the Irish Economy, UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science, (Dr Alan Fahey et al), November 2012

Following is a link to the conference programme.

http://www.veterinaryireland.ie/images/stories/IEVC_Prog_2014.pdf