

ASSESSMENT OF ANIMAL WELFARE IN SPORT HORSES IN THE EQUESTRIAN DISCIPLINE OF ENDURANCE BY ADAPTING THE AWIN PROTOCOL

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The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers an animal to be in a satisfactory state of welfare when it is healthy, comfortable and well nourished, can express its innate behaviour and is not in pain, fear or stress. Animals need to have a foundation of good nutrition, adequate health, proper management, all of which contribute to the maintenance of their welfare. Animal welfare is based on the following 5 freedoms: Freedom from hunger and thirst; Freedom from discomfort; Freedom from pain, injury, and illness; Freedom to express normal behavior; Freedom from fear and distress;

For the objective assessment of animal welfare in sport horses, we propose an adaptation of the Animal Welfare Indicators Project (AWIN) protocol for breeding horses, based on its four principles, to which we add zootechnical, physiological and behavioural criteria, related to the equestrian discipline they perform, in this case for equestrian endurance. This is where we will propose the modification of protocols based on pre-, intra- and post-competition clinical checks.

The most important sport-related zootechnical parameters are age, weight, sex, reproductive cycle, environmental parameters (temperature, humidity, ventilation), handling parameters (interaction between grooms, trainer, rider, equipment) and feeding according to the energy requirements of the sport. In terms of physiological parameters measurable in competition, heart rate and rhythm, respiratory rate, temperature, mucous membrane condition, skin fold, capillary refill time, intestinal borborigms, muscle tone, regularity of trot and hoof condition (including appropriate shoeing). Behavioural aspects: absence of stereotypes and lack of dressage or defensive behaviour.

By properly observing the proposed parameters and establishing average ranges, the degree of animal welfare of the sport horse between and during equestrian competitions can be assessed and the standards of the veterinary regulations of the national equestrian federations and the Fédération Equestre Internationale can be used.

Animal welfare is a valuable but difficult area of research in which strong emotional and popular beliefs may outweigh scientific evidence. However, regular monitoring of the horse's health can optimize its welfare and reduce situations that can negatively impact it.