

Report from the EAAP

PD Dr. med. vet. habil. Kathrin Friederike Stock, VIT, D- 27283 Verden

With the 67th annual meeting of the European Federation of Animal Science (EAAP) in Belfast, UK, from August 29 to September 2, 2016, the growing trend of the previous years was continued. Presentations arranged in 74 scientific sessions, including several one-day symposia, have attracted more than 1,500 participants from all over the world. Across species, studies on new traits, especially those relating to sustainability and health, and phenotyping strategies and on genetic diversity management have further gained in importance. The development of genomically enhanced breeding programs has brought about increased awareness of the importance of high quality data collection, which will allow extension and refinement of prediction formulae in routine genomic evaluations by direct linking of genotypes and target phenotypes. Among the sessions organized by the EAAP Horse Commission, the free communications on equine genetics and breeding were on high scientific level and received much attention. Studies on new trait definitions and modelling and on development of breeds and population structures indicated the challenges and the potential of breeding applications for improving equine performance: There is clearly room for improvement of breeding progress in riding horses, and the key for more successful breeding programs may be improving the data basis of routine analyses and applying powerful methodology, including genomic approaches. Promising results of linear data analyses from different countries indicate that linear profiling of equine conformation and performance can be seen as feasible way of sharpening the target traits in sport horse breeding. Approaches to reduce preselection bias of genetic proofs include extension of evaluation systems within and across studbooks, and promising results of comparative and joint analyses have been presented for traditional traits (scores, competition results) and new traits (linear data). The number of genomic applications in sport horse breeding is expected to grow in the near future, and the conference papers indicated that health and performance are both addressed in current equine genomic research.

The EAAP Horse Commission has taken the opportunity of the annual meeting to announce its continued engagement in supporting knowledge transfer and exchange among all stakeholders in the horse sector. Symposia and events like the annual international workshop on linear profiling that bring together science and practice are very much appreciated, have contributed to increased visibility of the EAAP and its Horse Commission and have - most importantly - shown the benefits of exchange and collaboration in developing new fields of horse breeding. With the move to genomically enhanced breeding programs for horses, studbooks will benefit from extension of joint research and development activities, implying a new role of coordination within the horse sector and of initiatives that facilitate and support across-studbook activities.