



The Conference announced 7 million Equines in Europe, following an ongoing statistical study made by the sector.

The European Equine Conference, co-organised by the **European Horse Network**, **Horse Racing Ireland** and the **European Federation of Thoroughbred Breeders' Associations** at the **Irish National Stud**, on **Tuesday, 22nd of September 2026** was the occasion to highlight the importance of Equines in Ireland and the strong cooperation of the sector at European level.

More than 65 equine professionals and politicians gathered around Nina Carberry and Hilde Vautmans, Members of the European Parliament, and the Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon TD.

IRELAND'S DIGITAL FRAMEWORK AS A CONTINENTAL MODEL

In Ireland, the new Equine database for identification and traceability is now a model to follow across the European Union. Minister Martin Heydon showcased the newly launched central equine database as a blueprint for EU-wide reform. The system represents a comprehensive digital infrastructure embedding traceability mechanisms throughout the sector.

Frances MacAodhain, leading implementation at the Department of Agriculture, outlined a practical architecture combining digital equine profiles managed by operators themselves, nine systematic traceability checkpoints integrated into routine activities including export approval and sales

cataloguing, and automated notifications regarding food-chain status through integration with the National Veterinary Prescribing System.

MEP Hilde Vautmans called for a EU financed project to extend Ireland's model across all Member States. She emphasised that this project represents a significant improvement for the health and welfare of equines throughout Europe. The next step is securing EU financial and legislative support for the development of proper national databases and interoperability at European level.

CAP

Minister Martin Heydon outlined the dual priorities of Ireland's EU Presidency: a workable welfare in transport regulation before the end of the year and the beginning of the trilogue, as well as a favourable budget allocation for the equine sector under the future CAP.

John Osborne, Director of Equine Welfare and Bloodstock at Horse Racing Ireland, affirmed that horse farms represent a sustainable rural growth opportunity resistant to automation. Irish breeder and trainer Annemarie O'Brien, highlighted existing practices such as hedge - planting and sustainable grassland management as evidence of genuine environmental alignment.

ANIMAL TRANSPORT

The animal transport regulation emerged as the European Equine Conference's most pressing regulatory priority. Des Leadon underscored the original challenge: the proposed regulation, drafted without equine expertise, treated horses transported for slaughter identically to those destined for competition or breeding.

Minister Martin Heydon confirmed that the Irish Presidency is actively chairing negotiations to create a workable welfare in transport regulation prior to trilogue discussions.

MEP Nina Carberry emphasised that while these amendments protect established breeding practices, stronger safeguards for horses destined for the food chain remain essential.

CROSS BORDER COOPERATION

MEP Nina Carberry pressed the case for a joined EU-wide digital system linking microchip data to trusted central records that follow horses across borders. She noted that the Commission's ongoing evaluation of the Animal Health Law presents a critical opportunity to advance this infrastructure, whilst the advanced stage of EU - UK Sanitary and Phytosanitary negotiations will simplify export documentation and data sharing arrangements post-Brexit.

EQUINE AGENDA

MEP Nina Carberry, proud to be on her home ground and recognised at European level as a strong defender of the equine sector, wants to promote even louder the values around equines, passion, sustainability and education.

Nina Carberry and Hilde Vautmans, co-chairwomen of the MEP Horse Group in the European Parliament will work in the coming months on how the equine industry could benefit more from a better access to medicines, an adequate and flexible recognition of health professionals, possible valuable exchanges of best practices for equine management under extreme heat, and a compatible definition of farmers in the future CAP to include financial support for equine farmers in the EU, these professionals are sustainable and respectful of the European social and green agenda.

MEP Hilde Vautmans concluded with three priorities for the MEP Horse Group's work in the coming months:

- Securing EU financial and legislative support for digital identification and joined-up European databases. This project could be one of the legacies of the Equine Conference and an improvement for the health and welfare of Equines.
- Harnessing artificial intelligence and data to address climate-driven challenges.
- Maintaining animal welfare at the forefront of policy.

