

Global Veterinary Summit

August 31- September 02, 2015 Orlando-FL, USA

Equine welfare in practice: A handy method to spot behavioural, physical and clinical aspects threatening equid-human relationships

Mariano Hernandez Gil

National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico

Equids make a valuable contribution to humanity by satisfying social, cultural, physical, emotional, mental or economic needs. However, their performance depends greatly on their welfare. Whilst it is recognised that the welfare of the animal is a key factor in the management of a patient, veterinarians often do not take the time to assess and discuss the animal's welfare with the owners. Early detection of a welfare problem, either by the vet or the owner, allows a quicker intervention and a better outcome for the animal and, in due course, for the humans relying on them. The aim of this presentation is to share experiences of the donkey sanctuary – UNAM Program on how we assess equine welfare in practice, using a simple but structured tool based on the hand to remind the assessor which behavioural, physical and clinical aspects to look for. The palm of the hand represents the life of the equine, its husbandry and its working practices, and the five fingers represent the main welfare indicators: 1) Human-equid interaction; 2) nutritional state; 3) wounds; 4) lameness; and 5) disease. The Hand reminds us to look at our equines in a holistic way, recognising that their welfare is a product of how they are used and the relationships between the owners and their animals. Through the five welfare indicators, we can rapidly assess the primary welfare problems. This approach allows us to prioritise where and how we work, targeting our resources to alleviate specific welfare problems of the equines in our program.

Biography

Mariano Hernández Gil obtained a degree in Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science (MVZ) from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Thereafter, he moved to the Autonomous University of Yucatan to obtain a Master's degree (MC) in Animal Nutrition. After that, he joined The Donkey Sanctuary - World Horse Welfare - UNAM joint program to improve the quality of life of working equids in Mexico, collaborating to identify factors putting welfare of equids at risk and addressing root causes. He is currently the head of the Equine Department at the College of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science of UNAM and the Country Manager of The Donkey Sanctuary - UNAM Program. Involved in education, extension and practice he promoted the benefits of proceeding with welfare in mind, always standing up by what a professional must listen from people in "equid-humanship" while incorporating developments in science.

mhg_fmzv@unam.mx

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