



Implications of farming donkeys

What does this mean to welfare and global risk of disease?

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“welfare is a wide term that embraces both the physical and mental well-being of the animal”.

Broom, D.M. Indicators of poor welfare. Br. Vet. J. 1986, 142, 524–526. [CrossRef]



What does farming mean to the donkey?

- The donkey has evolved to run in small groups
but farming is expanding to keep donkeys in ever increasing numbers
- The donkey will form strong bonds with others and will experience stress when separated
but farming necessitates the need to reorganise grouping



Stress will cause often fatal metabolic disease in the donkey.



What are the common problems?

The species has unique behavioural requirements, and problems are seen in:

- Handling
- Restraint
- Stress
- Inability to browse and express normal behaviour



Poor welfare leads to increased stress: and poor fertility can follow

Common health problems

Many of the problems seen result from a lack of understanding and knowledge but also because of the numbers farmed.

- Body condition – nutrition
- Lameness – foot care
- Wounds– behavioural issues
- Disease- infection control



Poor health and poor biosecurity leads to a high risk of disease spread.

What is the risk from infectious disease?

- The donkey is a stoic animals and rarely exhibits visible signs of illness.
- Many diseases are sub clinical
- Expanding and new farms purchase stock from multiple sources with unknown disease status.
- Long journeys cause stress and health issues which predispose to infection.

This expanding industry is a disease risk waiting to happen



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Farming or Holding unit/collection point

A farm is a premises where animals are kept for production purposes, usually through several stages of life.

A holding unit or collection point is a premises where animals are collected from various sources and gathered for a short period prior to movement to slaughter.

The collection and mixing of donkeys from multiple sources:

- Increases the risk of disease spread and escalation
- Reduces the likelihood of traceability of products
- Causes immense stress to the donkeys gathered on the premises.



What is the global risk?

There is a risk from trade in

- Live animals – carrying infectious diseases across borders
- Trade in products- carrying infectious agents, or infected vectors

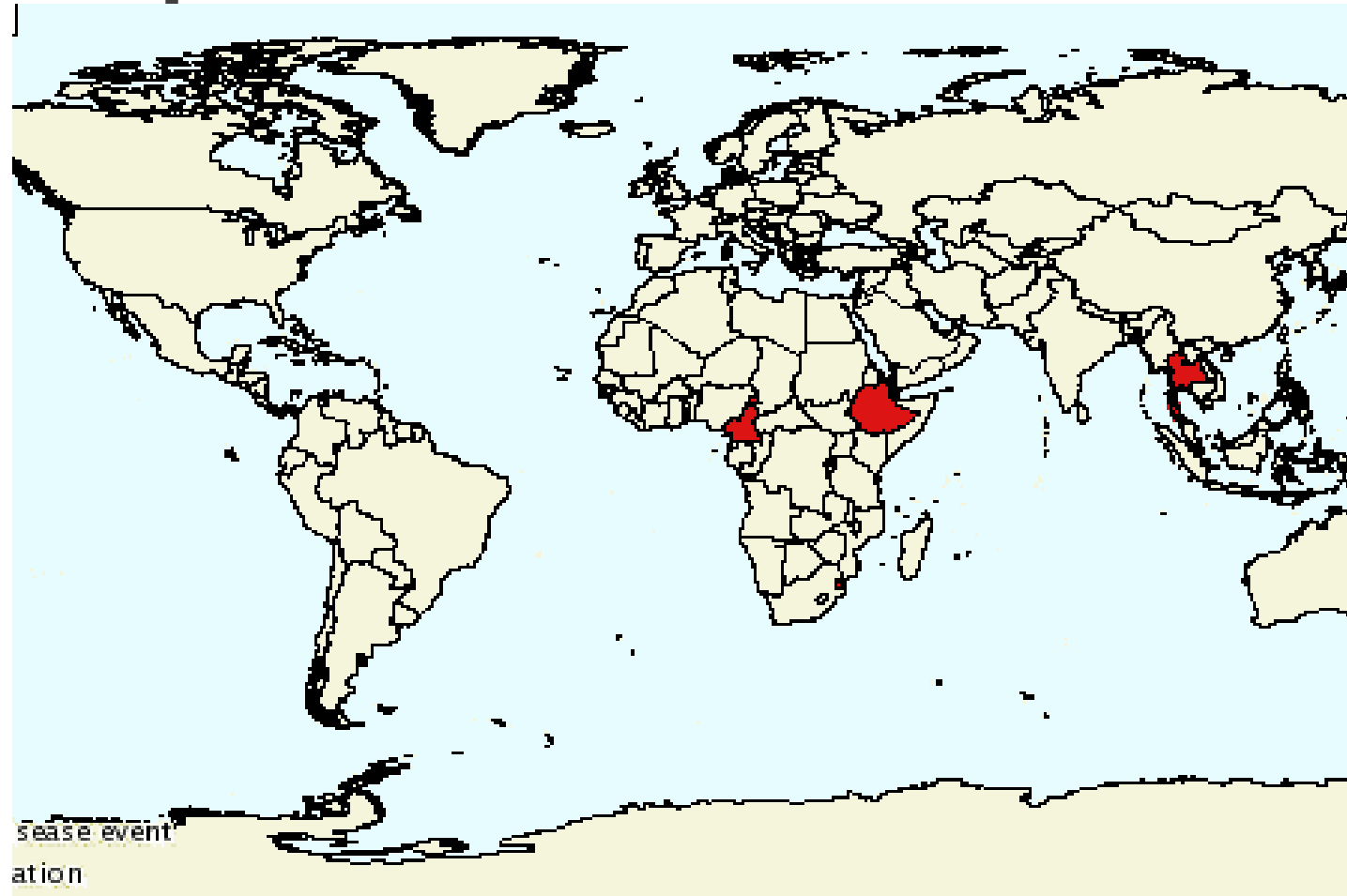
The risk is to animals and people and affects food safety, welfare and public health.

Consider the economic impact of an outbreak and spread of infection to the sports horse industry.



Consider global spread

African Horse Sickness



African Horse Sickness 2020
World Animal Health Information Database (WAHIS Interface) World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

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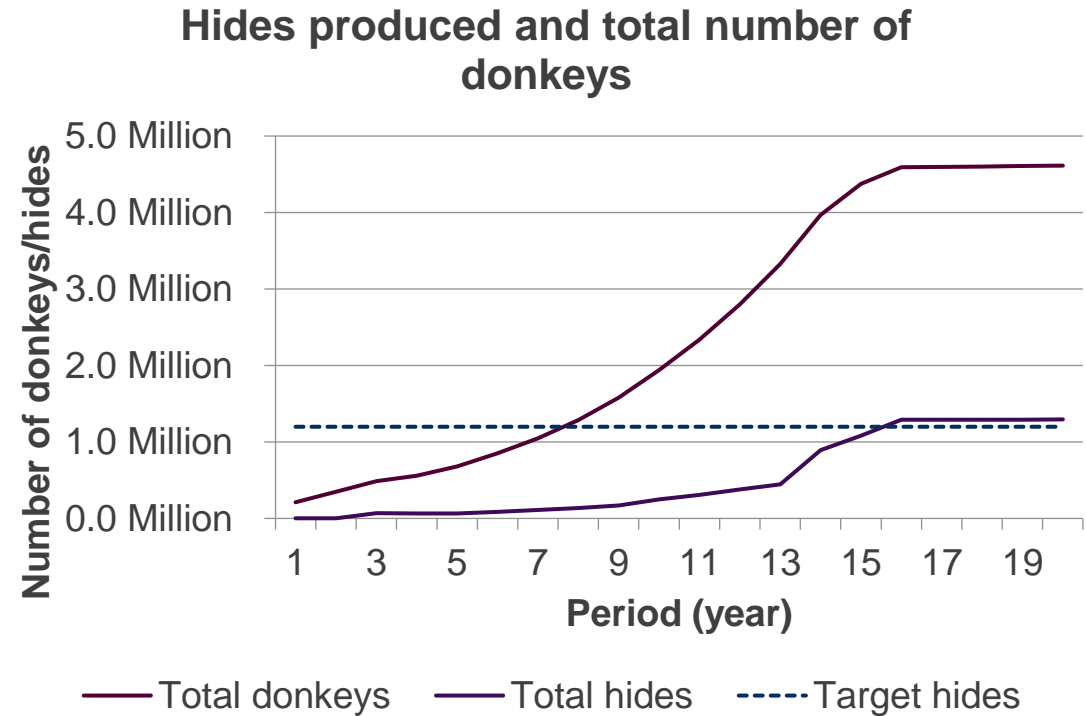


Is farming a viable industry?

Using modelling this illustration indicates a timescale of 15 years to build up a farming system that can supply 1.2 million hides a year.

The number of donkeys in the farming system would be 4.6 million.

Modelling helps us to predict production levels, using several informed assumptions and a starting number of 200,000 female donkeys, which would be likely to require access to a population of around 400,000 donkeys.



Source: Data from Bennett and Pfuderer (2019) University of Reading.

Donkey farming will not produce quick results for economic viability.



What is the future?

Consider the sustainability of this industry

Is this an acceptable trade-in for the

- Poor welfare and suffering of thousands of donkeys,
- Global disease threat,
- Economic impact to countries,
- Public health threat to people,
- Reduction in the population of a working equid that is vital to livelihoods?

And -can we aspire to farming which will allow a donkey a “life worth living” (Mellor,2017) or, at least provide them with a good quality of life?



Acknowledgements and references

Bennett, R.; Pfuderer, S. The Potential for New Donkey Farming Systems to Supply the Growing Demand for Hides. *Animals* **2020**

Mellor, D.J. (2017). Operational details of the Five Domains Model and its key applications to the assessment and management of animal welfare. *Animals* 7(8), 60; doi:10.3390/ani7080060.

World Animal Health Information Database (WAHIS Interface) World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)