



**HORSE SPORT
IRELAND**

2026

Irish Sport Horse Report



Prepared by
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Geneticist



HORSE SPORT IRELAND

**Priority 2: Excellence in Breeding and
High Performance Sport**



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Foreword



I am pleased to introduce the 2026 Irish Sport Horse Report, a data-led overview of the population and the continued success of Irish Sport Horse breeders.

The Irish Sport Horse continues to enjoy an exceptional reputation on the international stage. The studbook has consistently ranked among the world's leading eventing and within the top 10 show jumping studbooks globally. The report identifies that Irish Sport Horses are competing internationally under more than 50 national federations, demonstrating the global reach and continued demand for the breed.

This report also provides an important insight into the scale and changing profile of the breeding population. While 4,245 ISH foals are currently recorded for 2025, this figure will increase as late foal registrations are completed. Recorded totals for previous years may also increase as older horses gain entry to the supplementary section of the studbook through the inspection process. Understanding these trends is important when assessing changes in annual foal numbers and the longer-term development of the population. As in other reports, we wish to remind breeders of the importance of registering foals within the legislative timeframes, to ensure compliance but also accurate studbook reporting.

Alongside population and performance data, Horse Sport Ireland continues to invest in research, genetic evaluation and genomic technologies to provide breeders with better information to support breeding decisions. The transition to SNP-based parentage verification, genetic health screening and ongoing research into the structure and genetics of the population are further strengthening the evidence base available to breeders. At events, we are increasingly being asked for more information and statistics on the Irish Sport Horse. We hope readers both enjoy and benefit from this report.

The continued success of the Irish Sport Horse ultimately reflects the knowledge, commitment and long-term decisions of its breeders, supported by owners, producers, riders and the wider industry.

Best wishes,

Sonja Egan, PhD

**Head of Breeding Innovation
and Development,
Horse Sport Ireland**



Key Takeaways



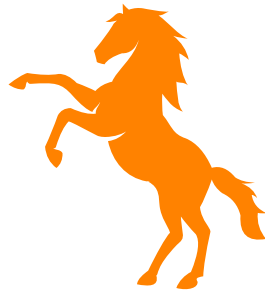
4,245

Number of ISH foals born in 2025



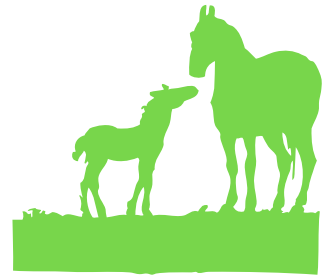
Use of Foreign bred stallions has increased 10% in last decade

23% of ISH foals were born to ISH stallions in 2025

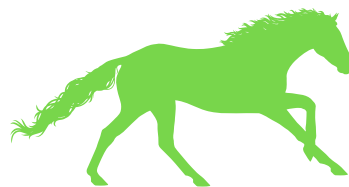


72%

of 2025 ISH Foals were born to ISH Dams



Stallions from **74** different studbooks have contributed to the ISH population in last 10 years



43%

Average thoroughbred percentage of ISH foals born in 2025

50%

Average thoroughbred percentage of ISH horses registered for FEI Eventing in 2026





Introduction

The Irish Sport Horse (ISH) breed originated in the 1920s, when breeders began crossing Irish Draught (ID) and Thoroughbred (TB) horses to produce athletic, versatile sport horses. To support the development of this emerging population, the Irish Sport Horse Studbook was established in 1974. While initially based predominantly on Irish Draught and Thoroughbred bloodlines, with some Connemara Pony influence, the studbook has evolved into a genetically diverse performance population through the inclusion of warmblood and other international sport horse genetics.

The ISH Studbook is a member of the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) and has consistently ranked among the world's leading studbooks for eventing and show jumping.

Today, the ISH breeding programme combines Traditional Irish Horse (TIH) bloodlines with genetics from approved international sport horse studbooks, reflecting a structured cross-breeding approach focused on producing horses capable of competing at the highest levels of international equestrian sport. Eligible Irish Draught, Thoroughbred, Connemara Pony, Irish Sport Pony and approved international sport horse breeding animals continue to provide significant contribute to the breeding population, providing breeders with access to a broad and diverse genetic base.

The breeding objective of the Irish Sport Horse Studbook is the continual improvement of a sound, athletic and rideable horse with good movement, temperament and longevity, capable of excelling in the Olympic disciplines of show jumping and eventing.

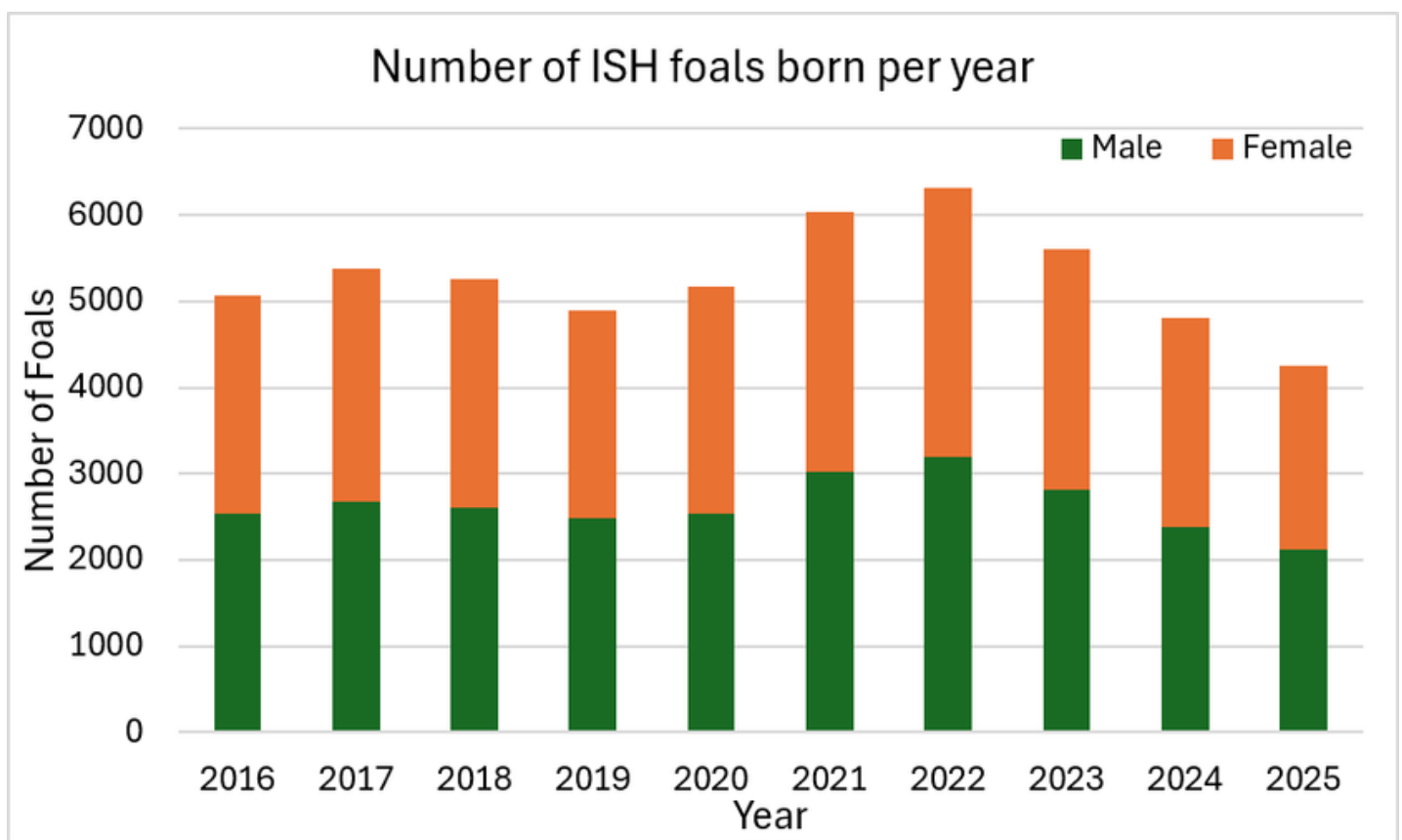
Breed improvement is underpinned by a performance-based breeding programme that combines pedigree analysis, studbook inspections, linear profiling, national and international competition results, and genetic evaluation. The studbook operates a performance star-rating system for both mares and stallions, recognising animals that have demonstrated genetic merit through their own performance and/or the performance of their progeny.

Together, these tools provide breeders with objective information to support selection and mating decisions, ensuring that breeding progress is driven by measurable performance outcomes while retaining the qualities that have long distinguished the Irish Sport Horse on the international stage.



Population Statistics

Typically, there are around 5,000 ISH foals born per year with the number of births peaking in 2022 with 6,312 ISH births. As in line with other WBFSH studbooks, there has been a slight decrease in the number of foals born per annum related to rising inflation and associated pressures. However, the number of foals born in the last couple of years will increase due to late registration of some horses and adult entries into the ISH supplementary section via the studbook inspection process.



While the ISH was traditionally a cross of the Irish Draught (ID), Thoroughbred (TB), and Connemara Pony (CP), the ISH cross breeding program now allows the registration of the progeny of all studbooks that are full members of the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horse (WBFSH) alongside a small number of other breeds that are listed in appendix 1 of the Breeding Programme for the Irish Sport Horse studbook (available on the HSI website). The number of foals born to ISH and TB stallions has decreased over the years (Table 1), while the percentage of foals born to Warmblood stallions has increased 10% over the last decade. In comparison, the number of foals born to ISH dams has remained relatively consistent over the last 10 years (Table 2).



Table 1. The number of foals born per breed of sire within each year

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Irish Sport Horse	1380	1411	1366	1309	1357	1548	1612	1152	1044	978
Irish Draught	534	609	615	548	566	689	681	556	525	466
Connemara Pony	180	232	185	190	192	268	350	390	349	297
Thoroughbred	749	701	641	510	587	570	550	385	246	190
Irish Cob						10	13	16	18	20
Irish Sport Pony						2	4	2	4	4
Irish Piebald and Skewbald Association			1	5	1	4	3	4	4	
Weatherbys Non Thoroughbred	17	13	3		1	1	1			
Warmblood Studbook of Ireland				2	2	7	3		6	4
Unknown Breed[^]	4	5	1	2		5				
Other breeds - Foreign	2207	2412	2444	2321	2458	2930	3095	3099	2605	2286
Total	5071	5383	5256	4887	5164	6034	6312	5604	4801	4245

[^]Progeny gained supplementary entry to ISH studbook following inspection.



Table 2. The number of foals born per breed of dam within each year

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Irish Sport Horse	3838	4045	3919	3677	3891	4428	4656	4029	3512	3076
Thoroughbred	258	301	307	292	311	457	552	507	458	392
Irish Draught	341	329	296	253	254	254	268	248	172	137
Connemara Pony	95	92	88	66	83	107	80	54	55	39
Weatherbys Non Thoroughbred	35	30	33	19	19	22	23	27	27	11
Irish Sport Pony	11	13	14	9	9	16	13	19	18	7
Warmblood Studbook of Ireland	2	2	2	5	10	11	11	6	7	9
Irish Cob					1	4	3	4	3	3
Irish Piebald and Skewbald Association	8	14	6	11	3	23	18	29	13	16
Unknown Breed[^]	133	140	99	67	15	26	1	1	3	3
Other breeds - Foreign	350	417	492	488	568	686	687	680	533	552
Total	5071	5383	5256	4887	5164	6034	6312	5604	4801	4245

[^]Progeny gained supplementary entry to ISH studbook following inspection.

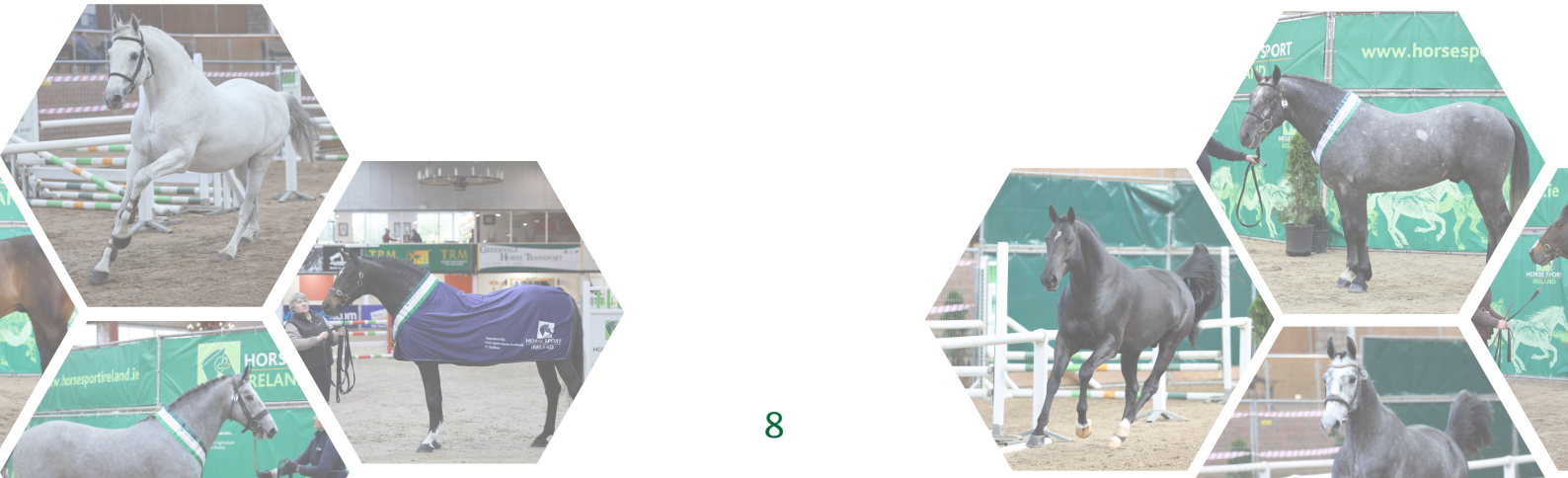


Stallions

The active number of stallions producing an ISH foal can vary widely across years. Last year the number of stallions that sired an ISH foal was lower than previous years with 789 stallions contributing their genetics to the ISH population; 35% of these stallions only had 1 ISH foal and only 13% of these stallions had 10 or more progeny registered within the ISH studbook in 2025. In previous years it wasn't unlikely to see some stallions siring over 250 foals per annum but the last 2 years the maximum number of foals per stallion has not exceeded 95.

Table 3. The number of stallions producing an ISH foal per year with the average, minimum, and maximum number of ISH progeny per stallion within year

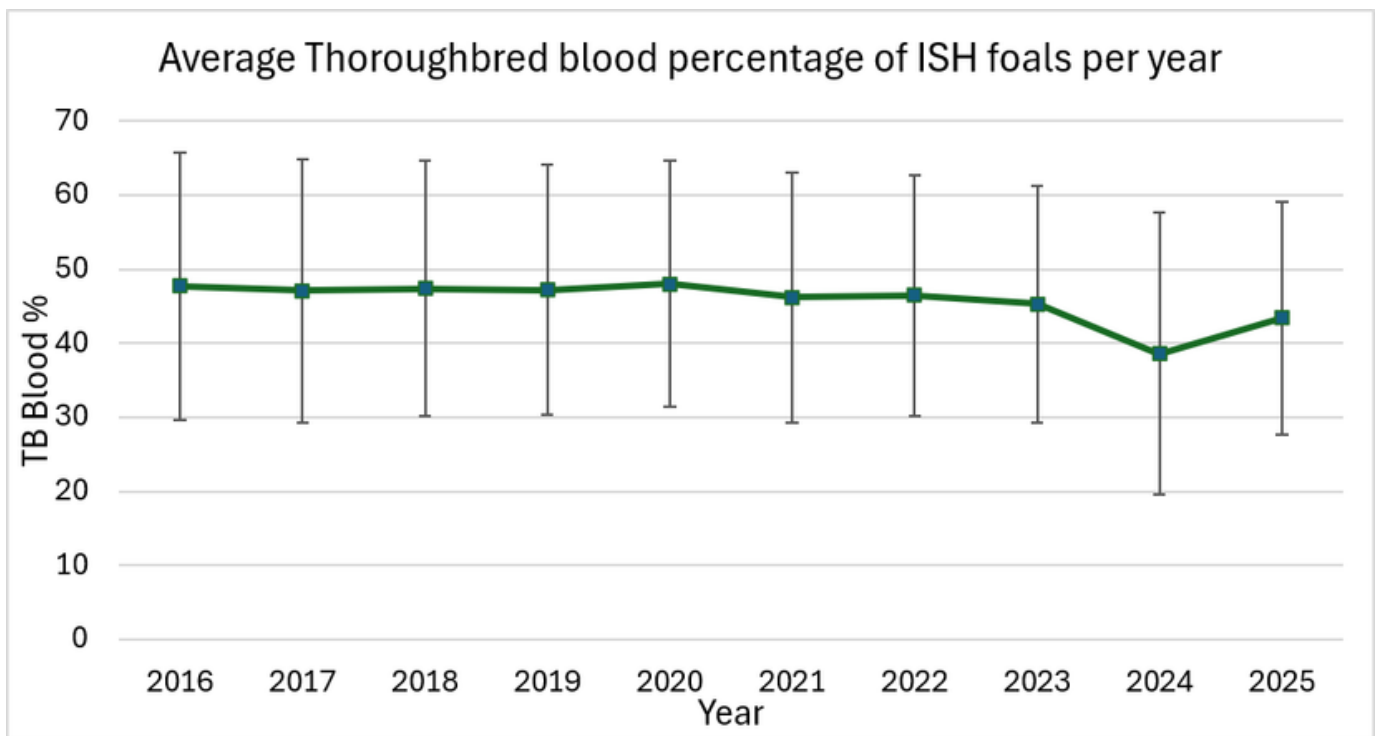
Year	Number of Stallions	Average	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
2016	823	6.16	13.20	1	263
2017	858	6.27	13.48	1	220
2018	867	6.06	12.67	1	189
2019	829	5.90	13.76	1	246
2020	875	5.90	13.80	1	269
2021	938	6.43	13.50	1	217
2022	986	6.40	13.36	1	219
2023	912	6.14	12.01	1	169
2024	846	5.67	9.85	1	95
2025	789	5.38	8.50	1	72





Thoroughbred %

Thoroughbred blood percentage is an important statistic when breeding sport horses, especially for an event horse. The average eventing horse is 50% to 70% TB as eventing requires speed and stamina for the cross country phase. The average TB% of the ISH has typically held steady at just under 50% but has been slightly decreasing over the last few years as sport horse breeders have moved away from the traditional TB cross and introduced more continental warmblood breeds. The figure below indicates the average TB % of ISH foals within year, with the error bars indicating the standard deviation. For the first time, the average TB% of the ISH was just below 40% in 2024. In contrast, the average TB% of the ISH horses registered for eventing with the FEI in 2026 was 50%.





FEI Registered ISH

A total of 2,263 ISH horses have been registered with the FEI in 2026 so far (July 2026). The vast majority of these horses are registered as eventers and/or showjumpers while some ISH are also competing in dressage, para dressage, driving and vaulting. The ISH competing internationally are registered with 51 different national federations indicating how wide spread the Irish bred horses are across the globe.

The World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) maintain a ranking system for show jumping, eventing and dressage each year. The ISH studbook has consistently ranked in the top 3 for eventing since the WBFSH rankings began. In 2025, the ISH studbook ranked 2nd for eventing and 7th for show jumping in the final studbook rankings. So far in July 2026, the ISH is back in 1st for eventing and is maintaining 7th place for show jumping studbooks, however the final rankings will not be confirmed until October.

WBFSH Studbook Show Jumping Rankings

The ISH contributing to the current July 2026 7th place ranking for show jumping are as follows:

CLONTERM OBOLENSKY (2016) by CORNET OBOLENSKY out of SHE HAS THE LUX by LUX Z. Breeder: Brian Duff

JAMES KANN CRUZ aka CSF JAMES KANN CRUZ (2013) by KANNAN out of CSF TELLY CRUZ by CRUISING. Breeder: Patrick Connolly

BH GRINGOS LEGACY (2015) by TULLIBARDS BENNY'S LEGACY out of GRINGOS COLOURFIELD by COLOURFIELD. Breeder: Kieran Phelan

MY CLEMENTINE (2015) by O.B.O.S. QUALITY 004 out of QUALISCA DE VANSICANT by KASHMIR VAN SCHUTTERSHOF. Breeder: David Prentice

RINCOOLA MILSEAN (2013) by ALDATUS Z out of RINCOOLA ABU by CRUISING. Breeder: Harold McGahern

ESI ROCKY (2015) by STAKKATO GOLD out of CLONASLEA by FOR PLEASURE. Breeder: Ennisnag Stud



WBFSH Eventing Rankings

The ISH contributing to the current July 2026 1st place ranking for eventing are as follows:

TULLABEG PLATINUM (2014) by DIGNIFIED VAN'T ZORGVLIET out of TULLABEG HERO by CULT HERO (CAN). Breeder: Nicholas Cousins

SHANROE COOLEY aka SHANROE ITALK (2015) by DALLAS VDL out of SHANROE SAPPHIRE by CONDIOS. Breeder: Anthony Smith

HSB BLAKE aka GALWAYBAY BLAKE aka GALWAYBAY HSB REDFIELD (2015) by TOLAN R out of DOUGHISKA LASS by KANNAN. Breeder: Justin Burke

FLASH COOLEY aka CASTLEFIELD FLASH COOLEY (2012) by CSF MR KROON out of CASTLEFIELD RUBY by O.B.O.S. QUALITY 004. Breeder: Gerard O'Neill

COOLEY NUTCRACKER aka COOLEY NUTCRACKER (2014) by TOLAN R out of BALLYSHAN CLEOPATRA by COBRA. Breeder: Gary Doherty

COOLEY PARK MUZE aka TJM REUBEN (2016) by POLLUX DE MUZE Z out of TJM L ARC IN THE PARK by L'ARC DE TRIOMPHE. Breeder: John Connolly





Genetic Testing

With the introduction of SNP genotyping for parentage testing in recent years, HSI have begun monitoring the incidence of genetic diseases in the ISH population. The main genetic diseases currently being monitored are Fragile Foal Syndrome and Hoof Wall Separation Disease with hopes to roll out whole population testing at birth in the coming months. Screening of all foals for chromosomal abnormalities has also been conducted since 2024.

Fragile Foal Syndrome

Fragile Foal Syndrome (FFS) is a fatal inherited connective tissue disorder in horses caused by a mutation in the *PLOD1* gene. It is an autosomal recessive disease meaning that a foal must have two copies of the defective gene to have FFS. A foal with two copies of FFS will have abnormally thin, hyperextensible, fragile skin and mucous membranes. Affected foals may also have hyperextensible limbs, floppy ears, accumulation of fluid, and hematomas, among other symptoms, and will not survive long after birth. Carriers with only one copy can live normal, healthy, competitive lives. In actual fact, previous research has indicated that FFS carriers were being inadvertently selected for during some warmblood studbooks selection days as the carriers can appear to have a longer, more expressive stride and movement than a non carrier. FFS carriers are present in all breeds so it is important that all horses are tested for this as breeding two carriers results in a 25% chance that the foal will not survive.

Hoof Wall Separation Disease

Hoof Wall Separation Disease (HWSD) is a non lethal genetic defect in horses caused by a mutation in the *SERPINB11* gene. HWSD is an autosomal recessive disease meaning that a foal must have two copies of the defective gene to have HWSD. A horse with two copies of HWSD will have brittle hooves where the outer hoof wall can split and separate and make it hard to hold shoe nails. While HWSD is not lethal, affected horses will require specialist hoof care to remain sound throughout their lives. Carriers of the disease with one copy of the HWSD mutation can live normal, healthy, competitive lives. This disease is thought to have originated in Connemara Ponies and extensive testing has been carried out in the breed since 2015. A number of other breeds that have been influenced by the Connemara Pony have also been detected as carriers of this disease so widespread roll out to these breeds will hopefully minimise the number of affected foals born in the future as breeding two carriers results in a 25% chance that the foal will be affected.



Research

Horse Sport Ireland has undertaken extensive research and analysis of the Irish Sport Horse population to improve our understanding of its genetics, population structure, breeding trends and performance. This work includes genetic evaluations and Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs), analysis of linear profiling data, research into the Traditional Irish Horse population, and the application of increasingly advanced genomic technologies.

HSI has also contributed to peer-reviewed scientific research exploring the use of SNP genotype data, including genotype imputation and the identification of chromosomal abnormalities. Together, this research supports evidence-based breeding decisions, informs the continued development of the ISH breeding programme and provides breeders with better information to support selection.

Much of this research, together with HSI reports and scientific publications, is publicly available. If you are interested in learning more, please explore these publications by clicking the image below.





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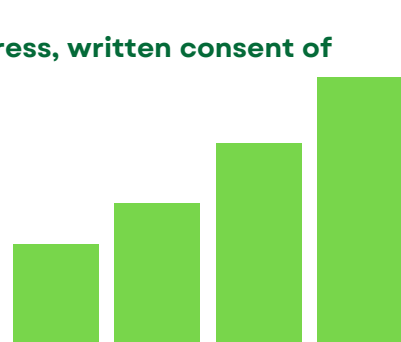
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