

June 1, 2021



Dear NFHR Members:

The NFHR board recently evaluated and granted an appeal regarding the registration of an imported stallion. This action has subsequently generated discussion amongst the membership. The rule for crossbreeding is narrow in scope and silent on importation of Fjords that have been used for crossbreeding.

I am asking you to carefully read the rule itself and to consider all of the ramifications in developing a rule that is inclusive and fair. The issue is complex and nuanced.

While we have already heard from many of you, I invite all members to comment via email directly to me or to any other board member. Our contact information is on the NFHR website. Your comments are important to the board as we prepare for discussions regarding the NFHR Rules of Registration at the in-person board of directors meeting to be scheduled in early 2022.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Rory K. Miller
President of the NFHR

The Rule

Article I. D. In the interest of protecting the genetic purity and the highest standards of the Norwegian Fjord Horse, the NFHR Registrar will withdraw from the Norwegian Fjord Horse Registry any mare or stallion that is used for crossbreeding with another breed or species. Violators may have their membership suspended and may lose all membership privileges including registration, transfer of horses and any voting rights. The names of horses who have been crossbred and their owners will be placed on the suspended list.

Supplemental Information

Background

The Rule is narrow in scope. It applies only to horses registered by the NFHR that have been used for cross breeding. The Rule is not clear as to when the cross breeding occurred: before or after registration with the NFHR. It does not address artificial insemination. It is silent on imported horses that have been used for crossbreeding under a foreign registry in a foreign country. The Rule is silent on the use of imported semen from foreign horses that have been used for cross breeding or on semen from a domestic horse that has been used for crossbreeding.

The 2021 Appeal

After an imported Fjord was denied registration due to having been used for crossbreeding in Europe, an appeal was made to the board. In the appeal, the appellant asked for relief citing several reasons. The horse had been used in accordance with its registry in Europe, and the appellant was not involved. The appellant desires to improve genetic diversity in the U.S. and stated in writing that there is no intention to cross breed.

In its discussion of the appeal, the NFHR board recognized the limitations of the Rule as stated. The Rule is silent on imported horses and does not seem to address the timing of the crossbreeding activity. The Board focused on the genetic purity of the horse in question and noted that introduction into the US breeding programs of a wider genetic strain is desirable. Denying the registration of this imported stallion could dampen any desire by a US breeder to become involved in importation of foreign horses. There was concern that a US breeder importing a foreign horse could unknowingly be importing a horse that had been used for cross breeding. Since Fjords in foreign countries are not banned from use in cross breeding nor are they tracked, this could result in suspension of registration of the imported horse should a history of past foreign cross breeding surface. This is a serious risk for US breeders and would have a severe economic impact on the US breeder.

While the NFHR board granted the appeal, grave concern was expressed concerning using Fjord horses for cross breeding. The board is strongly opposed to cross breeding. Furthermore, the board was clear that this appeal applies to this particular horse in this situation. There has been no change to the Rule as it is written.

Questions

There are other questions that arise concerning the crossbreeding Rule. The Rule does not address the use of artificial insemination. When semen is sold, how can the NFHR be sure that the semen is used to breed another registered Fjord (either in the US or in a foreign country)? Can the semen transfer be tracked should the semen be sold by the original purchaser to someone else in the future? Both the use and tracking of semen for artificial insemination is problematic.

The crossbreeding rule impacts the Transfer from Foreign Registry Rule. The significant point of Article IV. B. 1 notes that transfers from foreign registries are permitted as long as the Rules of Registration and Transfers for the foreign registry are consistent with NFHR registration requirements. However, there is an inconsistency between the NFHR Rules of Registration and foreign registries. Most foreign registries are silent on cross breeding; thus, they do not explicitly forbid or penalize cross breeding. Foreign registries view a pure-bred Fjord as a pure-bred Fjord and rely on the purity of the parentage DNA regardless of the use of the horse. When a horse is imported to the US, there is no certainty that the horse has not been used for crossbreeding. The NFHR rule is punitive for both the NFHR member and the horse.

Cases and Questions

Case #1: 2012. A NFHR registered horse was born in 2006, registered in 2007, and sold to the current, non-NFHR owner in 2008. The horse was used for crossbreeding after it had been registered and sold to the current owner, which subsequently was discovered on an internet advertising site. The registration was revoked and then appealed. The appeal was denied in October 2012.

In Case #1, there was no penalty levied because the owner is not a NFHR member. The registry of the horse was revoked. In so doing, any potential contribution of the horse to the pure-bred gene pool was lost.

Case #2: 2019. In good faith, a NFHR member purchased foreign stallion semen. The Member was issued a semen transport permit. The semen has not been used. In 2021, the foreign-registered stallion (semen donor) was posted on social media as having been used for cross breeding. No action was taken.

In Case #2, the NFHR granted a transport permit to a member who purchased the semen in good faith only to discover later that the stallion (donor) had been used for crossbreeding. The semen has not been used, and no action was taken. This case points out the inability to track cross breeding either in the US or in foreign countries.

Case #3: 2021. A mature foreign-registered stallion was imported by an NFHR member and was discovered on social media to have been used for cross breeding. The horse was presented for registration, and the registration was denied. The denial was appealed and granted.

In Case #3, the appeal was supported because of potentially discouraging the importation of horses and the introduction of diverse genetics. It is also difficult to track and police cross breeding. With the potential of discouraging importation of horses, the gene pool in the US would become limited.

Based on these real cases, the results of each case are significantly different.

Theoretical Cases

Potential Case A. The member has two Fjords. One is registered, and the other is not. The member cross breeds the unregistered Fjord. Is the membership revoked? What happens to the registered Fjord that has not been used in the crossbreeding?

Potential Case B. Two members own an NFHR-registered Fjord together. Member X decides to cross breed the Fjord. Member Y objects, but member X cross breeds the horse anyway. Is the membership for member Y revoked? What happens to the registry of the horse? Can the rule be circumvented by member X transferring the horse to member Y? Who can appeal what?

Potential Case C. A NFHR-registered mare is used to breed Fjules (mules, with the dam being a Fjord). The progeny cannot replicate itself. What, if anything, does that affect?

Potential Case D. Any imported stallion two years of age or older is subject to CEM (Contagious Equine Metritis) Quarantine where the stallion is required to breed two mares that they culture to test for the presence of this infection. The mares they breed for this purpose are not likely to be fjords. Technically, every imported mature stallion has been crossbred. They just did not produce foals during quarantine.