THE PROBLEM

- Global donkey population is ~ 43.5 million. The donkey population in China alone has decreased from ~11 million a few years ago to ~5.4 million in 2016 (FAOSTAT, 2016). Heavy marketing for ejiao, a traditional Chinese medicine made using donkey skins, is contributing to increased demand for donkey skin outside China and increased global trade and poaching of donkeys to fill the need.
- Donkeys are poorly suited to intensive breeding practices due to long gestation periods, low fecundity, low success rates of artificial insemination and high propensity to abortion and mortality caused by stress. Although the ejiao industry in China is investing heavily in breeding donkeys, this is not currently meeting the demand.
- National demand for ejiao in China would require ~ 2.5 to 4.5 million donkey skins/year, yet they are only able to get 1 million/year thus, threat of unsustainable utilization and skyrocketing prices for donkeys is high as demand has out stripped supply.

HOW CAN THIS PROBLEM BE ADDRESSED?

- Trade in donkey skins should be halted until the impact of the trade can be assessed and shown to be both humane for donkeys and sustainable for the communities that depend on them.
- Governments and local authorities should support affected communities, by preventing the decimation of donkeys though protection from legal and illegal trade.
- Consumers of ejiao should be made informed about the source and impact of the product.
- Alternatives should be promoted that do not have negative effects on animal welfare, human development or public health. Examples include herbal alternatives and donkey skin/collagen grown in vitro.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- Support campaigns geared towards halting the immediate impacts of the trade in donkey skins.
- Create awareness of the impact of ejiao and of the better alternatives.
- Support welfare organizations and local authorities who are working to keep donkeys safe.

WORLD VETERINARY ASSOCIATION


Resources