A Statistical Study of the Horse Industry in Japan

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Although the food-producing livestock industry, such as beef and dairy cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and poultry, has developed significantly after WWII in Japan, the situation of horses is different. In this study, the statistical profile of horse industry in Japan from the past to the present has been studied.

Horses in past times: Before World War II, horse breeding was very popular in Japan and the horse population was high. In early 1930s, the population of horses is estimated to have been more than 1.5 million. They were mainly used for agricultural and military purposes. During WWII, about 30% of this population was lost and after the war, it rapidly decreased. The present population of horses in Japan is estimated to be about 115,000, i.e. about 6.5% of its original pre-war value.

Composition of present population of horses: As is shown in Fig.1, more than half (57.3%) of the current population is categorised as light horse. The other categories include horses for agricultural uses (20.3%), leisure horses (10.4%) native horses (2.6%) and meat horses (9.2%).

Light horses: Although light horse population (including breeding and racehorses) increased from mid-1960s to mid-1970s, since then it has remained almost constant, possibly declining slightly by the mid 1990s. Quality is still low. The thoroughbred and Arab are the main breeds used for light horse breeding. Although in the past, both were used almost equally, The thoroughbred now predominates (more than 87% of breeding mares and 77% of stallions).

Horses used in Japanese agriculture: The number of horses used in Japanese agriculture has significantly reduced from the pre-war era to present (Fig.2). During WWII the majority of horses moved from farms and were used for military purposes. A large number of horses were lost during the war and post-war, the horse industry rapidly lost its importance in the Japanese livestock industry. During just 5 years, from 1960 to 1965, the population of horses used in Japanese agricultural system was reduced by about 50%. Such an abrupt reduction is almost an exceptional situation in the world livestock industry. This population continuously decreased until late 1980s, increased slightly until mid-1990s and since then it has remained constant. At the present time, the number of horses in the Japanese agricultural industry is estimated to be about 30,000, (about 2.8% of original post-war population in early 1950s). Most of this population is concentrated in the northern island, i.e. Hokkaido.

Leisure horses: During 1980s, as the Japanese economy significantly improved, using leisure horses became more popular in Japan. Currently, the number of leisure horse has increased to more than 3 times what it was in the early 1970s.

Native horses of Japan: Native horses of Japan are mostly local population of horses rather than planned produced breeds. The main groups of Japanese native horse are as follows: Hokkaidowashu, Kiso, Noma, Taishu, Misaki, Tokara, Miyako and Yonaguni. Hokkaidowashu, comprised 83.2% of total population of Japanese native horses.

Meat Horses: Although horse meat consumption, especially for processed meat was relatively large during 1970s to 1980s, it has decreased from early 90s. However, compared to imported horsemeat, the share of domestic production has increased (4.6% in 1980, 28.1% in 1999).


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![Diagram](https://example.com/diagram.png)

**Figure 1.** Composition of present horse population in Japan.

**Fig.2.** The population of horses used in Japanese agricultural system.