

# IGA MEMBER VOICE SURVEY

## GROOMS' CATERING REPORT

NOVEMBER 2022



## INTRODUCTION

The International Grooms Association (IGA) was founded with the support of the FEI to give grooms a formal voice. It was a long held ambition of FEI President Ingmar De Vos to see grooms recognised as stakeholders in FEI sport, and the FEI and IGA are working together to achieve better recognition and conditions for grooms.

To help achieve this the IGA is running a series of member-only surveys, asking the IGA membership about issues that affect them whilst working at FEI competitions. The first of these surveys asked the grooms about their experiences of catering provisions at shows and events.

The FEI disciplines represented in the response were jumping (53%) eventing (28%) dressage (18%) and driving (2%).

69% of respondents had worked at 5\* level in the last 12 months, whilst only 26% had worked at a 1\*. This is perhaps reflective of the confidence of the more experienced grooms to speak about their experiences.

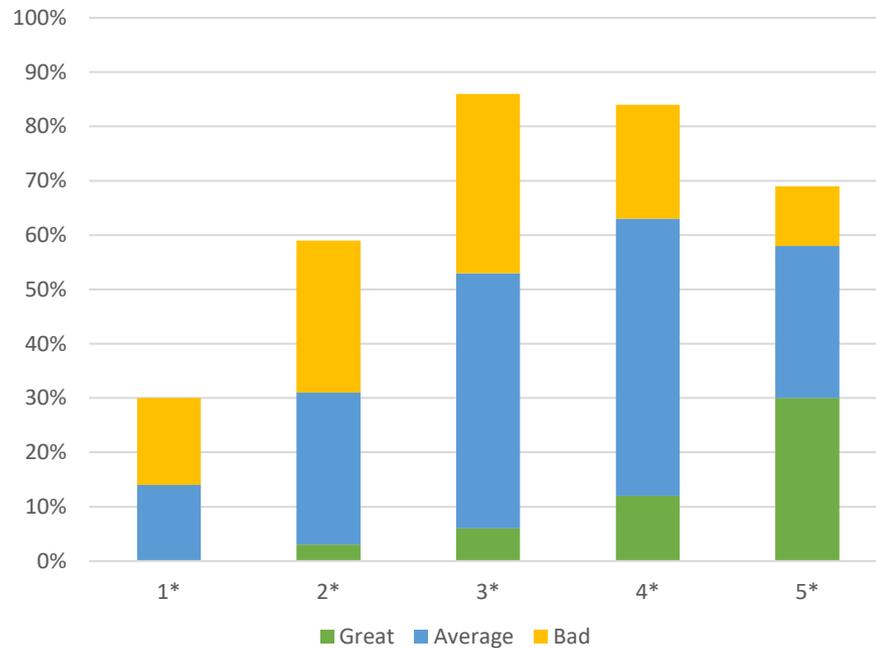
# THE HEADLINES

- Only 20% of respondents found that grooms' catering provided by FEI competitions fits in with their working day.
- 77% of respondents felt organisers don't consider the grooms' schedule.
- 75% wouldn't know who to complain to if there is a problem with catering at an FEI event.
- 96% felt that it should be a minimum requirement for tea, coffee and drinking water to be provided in the stable area.



## What rating of FEI shows have you attended in the last 12 months, and how would you rate the food provision for grooms at each?

Give a rating for the level of show(s) you have attended.

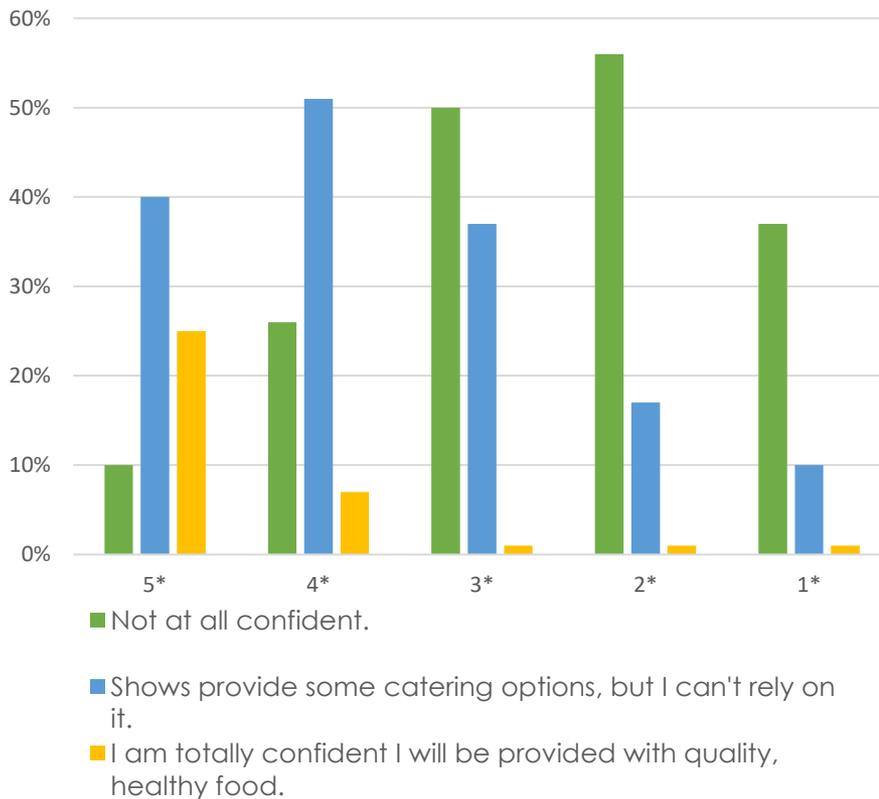


- Whilst the majority of respondents had not worked at a 1\* in the last year, 52% of those who had, said that catering provision was bad.
- As the show rating increases the catering provision improves. At 4\* level only 14% thought the catering was great, whilst at 5\* that jumped to 43%.
- Respondents consistently reported that food provision in Europe and Canada is generally more generous than in the US.

"Only 5\* shows provide food in Europe, in the US 5\* shows never feed you."

## How confident are you that you will be able to maintain a healthy and balanced diet whilst working at an international show?

Give a rating for the level of show(s) you have attended.



- The responses showed a significant lack of confidence that grooms will be able to maintain a healthy diet whilst working at shows.
- Even at 5\* level only 25% said they would be totally confident of being able to maintain a healthy and balanced diet whilst working at an FEI competition.
- As the show ratings get lower fewer grooms expect even a few healthy options to be provided to them.

"Often the food is incredibly expensive at international shows and the food that is available at non-meal times when grooms have a spare five minutes is insufficient."

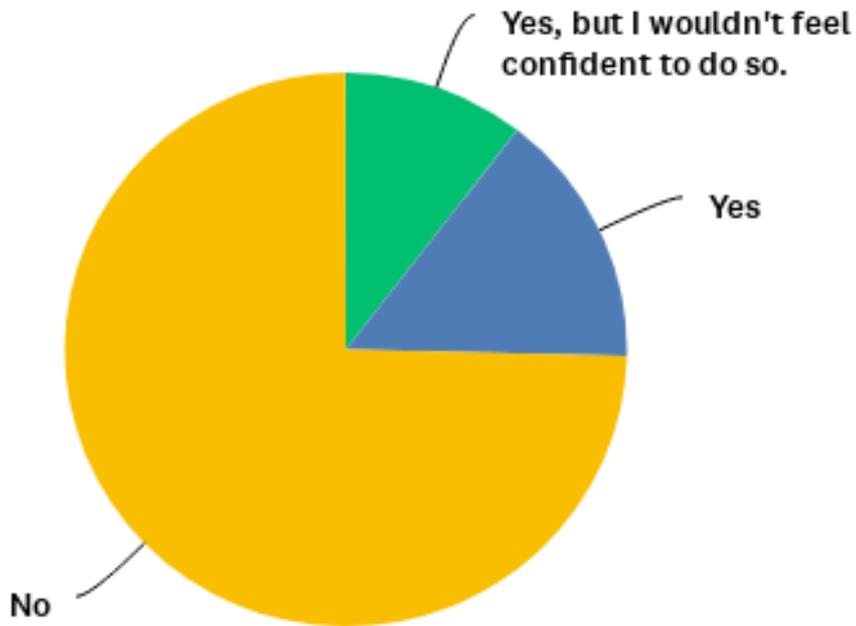
- When asked about FEI competitions that provide great catering, the shows and events mentioned were those that provided catering with flexible timings and takeaway options.

"Red Hills in Tallahassee, FL. Their catering tent was on the way to the rings, always had hot coffee and tea as well as donuts and fruit, all for free. This is a spring show that's always cold so having these hot drinks right there was so helpful."

"I really like Wiesbaden. They work with a point system. So if you have no time for breakfast you could do early lunch and a late lunch instead. The food tent is open the whole day from 0600 to 2000."

"At Neumünster the food is very close to stables with long opening hours to find a slot to grab a bite between training times, competitions."

## If there are problems with food provision at a show would you know who to complain to?

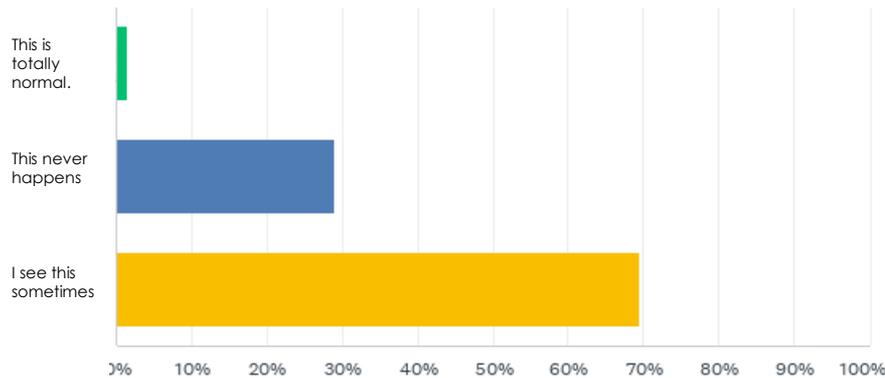


- 74% of respondents wouldn't know who to complain to if facing issues with food provision.
- Of the 15% of grooms who responded 'yes' to this question, only one was not a 5\* groom.
- A further 11% of respondents answered that they would know who to complain to, but wouldn't feel confident to.

**This points to a wider welfare issue within the industry.**

Grooms very often don't feel able to take their worries and complaints beyond the stable, even if organisers feel that they are trying to listen.

**In your experience, how normal is it for FEI shows (at all levels) to provide you with chilled drinking water, tea and coffee very near the stable area?**



- Of the 28% who said they have never been provided with hydration facilities in or very near the stables, 78% were 5\* grooms.
- More than 70% of respondents have had this provided at some shows, and unanimously agreed that it makes a huge difference to the grooms' working day.

- The qualitative comments in response to this question overwhelmingly demonstrate that grooms do not have the time or money to be able to use the public food outlets.
- As a result grooms often put their own welfare behind that of their horses and ignore the risks of dehydration in order to get their work done.
- Providing drinking water, tea and coffee is an important boost to grooms' physical and mental health.
- This is an easy way to improve welfare across the levels.

Many grooms told us that it is 'normal' to be dehydrated or even ill when there is nothing provided for them at the stables. **This is a serious welfare issue.**

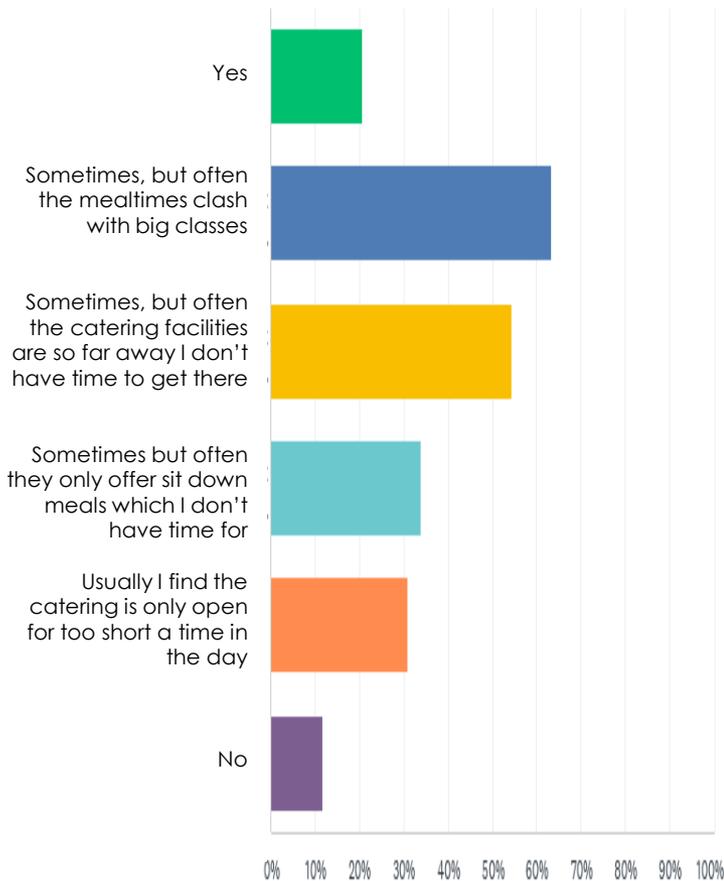
"Dehydration is often just a reality you are forced to struggle through."

"Sometimes grooms just don't stop from 6am to 10pm and we can be sick for never stopping (headache, vomiting, shaking) so a little something close by the stable is really helpful."

"Having water and coffee makes a big difference. Food outlets charge so much for drinks at shows."

"I have literally been so thirsty I've drunk from the hose to wash the horses with."

## Have the shows you have attended provided food on a schedule that fits with your working day?



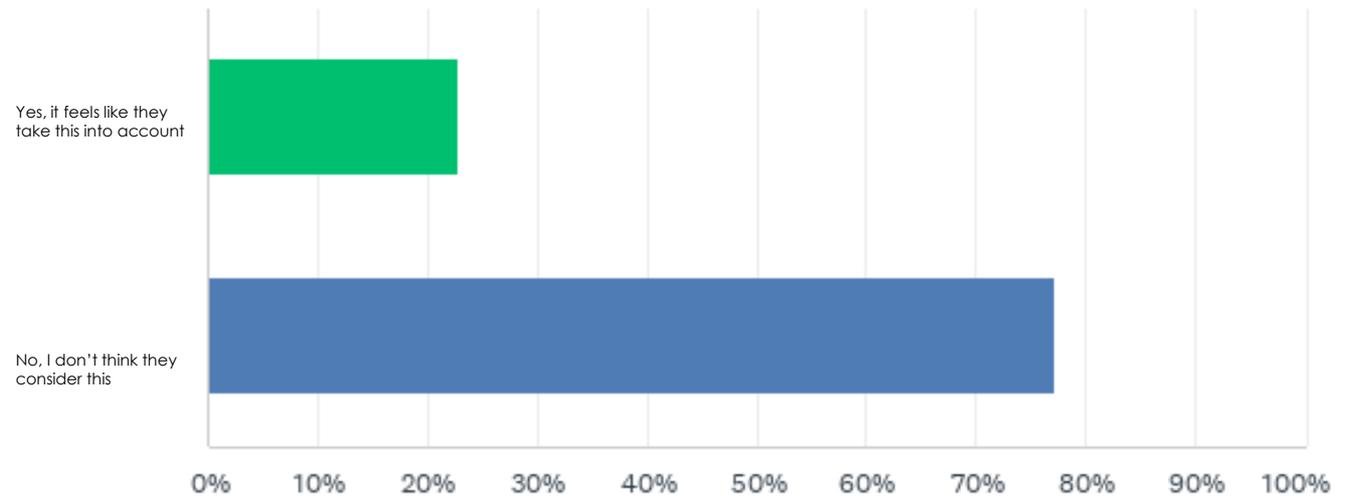
- The biggest barrier to grooms being able to use catering facilities were scheduling clashes and distance.

- 63% of respondents said meal times clashed with big classes.
- 54% reported that often the catering was too far away for them to have time to get there.
- 33% said they don't have time for a sit down meal during the day.

"Badminton was good this year with timings but would be good to have lunch so it's available to take away; I didn't use a single lunch ticket as the timings just didn't work out."

"Sometimes catering gets angry when we come early or late and ask for takeaway."

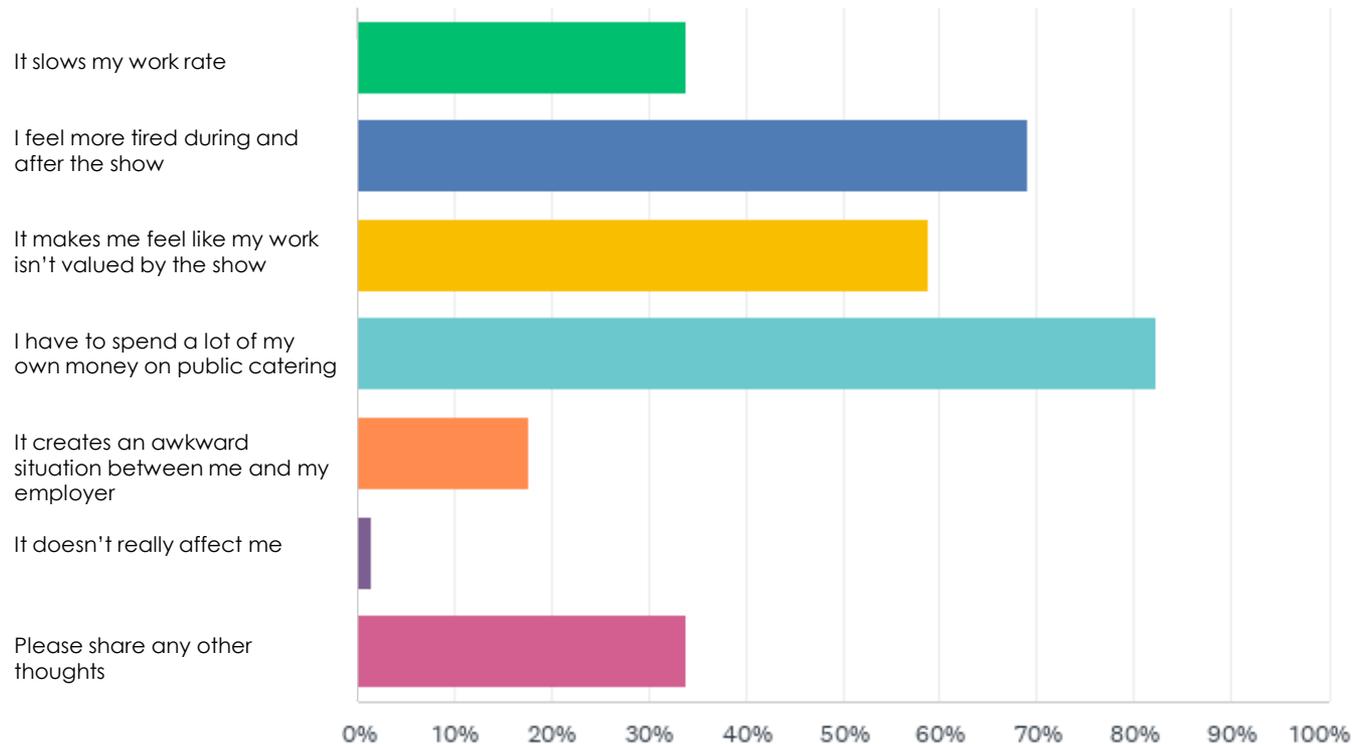
**In your opinion, do you think show organisers are planning grooms' catering timings with consideration for the grooms' unique schedule?**



- 77% of respondents don't think show organisers consider the unique schedule of the grooms when planning catering.

**It is important for us to help organisers better understand the grooms' schedule in order to combat this sense of disillusionment.**

## How do you think it impacts you when you are not fed properly at an international show?



## How do you think it impacts you when you are not fed properly at an international show?

- The responses to this question clearly demonstrate that when grooms have to provide all their own catering solutions they are impacted financially, as well as experiencing a negative effect on their mental and physical welfare.
- 83% reported having to spend a lot of their own money on public catering; a further 18% said that it creates an awkward situation with their employer when the food provision does not meet their needs.
- 34% believe that their work rate decreases when they cannot access reliable catering whilst working at FEI competitions, with 69% reporting that they feel more tired during and after a show which does not provide good grooms' catering.



- Public catering at equestrian events is often expensive, and at the bigger shows there are often long queues. There is a very clear need for shows to make at least some basic provision behind the scenes.
- Once again the responses to this question reflect a sense of disenfranchisement; 58% of respondents said it makes them feel like their work isn't valued by the show when there is not an adequate catering solution provided.

"In lower level shows there is never catering and grooms have to pay a fortune to eat. We can't afford to be spending 60€ a day.

There should be a reduced price for accredited grooms and it would be nice to get free water or at least drinkable taps, not the hosepipe."

**Bearing in mind costs and feasibility, which of the following do you feel should be the MINIMUM requirement at any FEI show in terms of grooms' catering provision?**

Refillable drinking water and tea/coffee available very near the stables

Unlimited snacks available very near the stables

Easy to grab food (sandwiches/wraps) available throughout the day in accordance with stable opening times

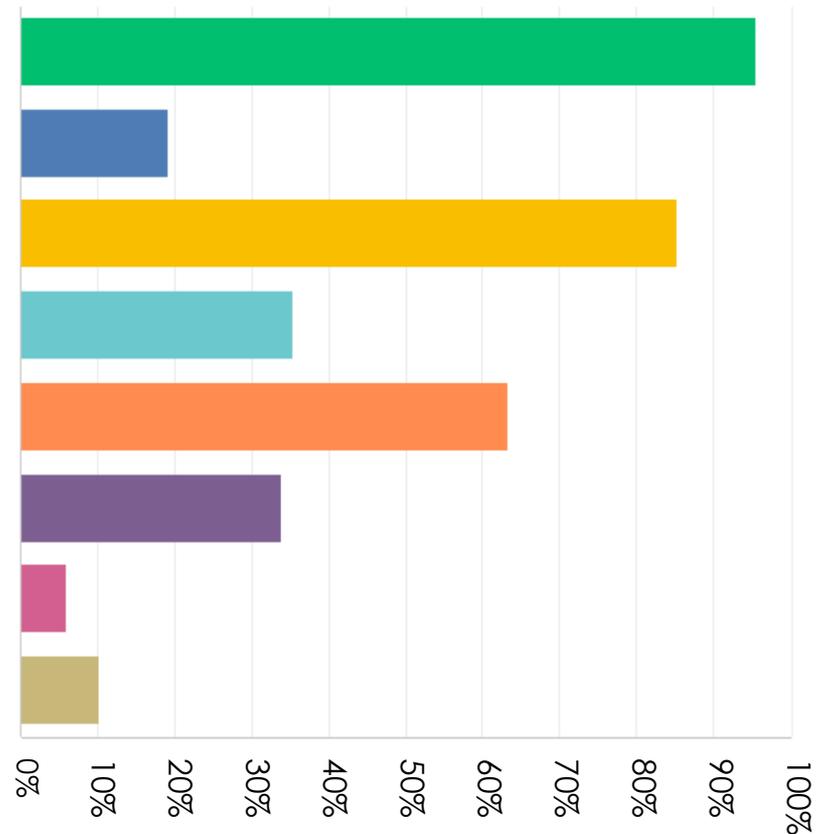
Healthy balanced meals provided freely throughout the day

Catering available within 5 minutes of the stable area

The same food as the riders

A free bar!

Showground Uber Eats



**Bearing in mind costs and feasibility, which of the following do you feel should be the MINIMUM requirement at any FEI show in terms of grooms' catering provision?**

- 96% asked for refillable drinking water and tea/coffee facilities in or near the stables.
- 85% responded that they believe there should be food they can take back to the stables such as sandwiches or wraps available in accordance with stable times.
- Only 35% expect to be provided with meals throughout the day, and just 33% responded that they would like the same food as the riders.
- **The results of this question show that the priority for IGA members is to be able to quickly access food and drink so that they can do their job to the best of their ability.**



# IGA RECOMMENDATIONS



**Based on these findings, the IGA has come up with a list of recommendations for all FEI competitions:**

- Freely available tea, coffee and drinking water in the stables. If the tap water is drinkable, provision of cups or refillable bottles and efforts made to ensure the grooms are aware the water is safe to drink.

*In the UK, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations) 1992 state that employers must provide “an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water”. Furthermore, the water supply should be **readily available and clearly labelled**.*

- Lower-level shows should offer a cost reduction to accredited grooms using the public catering.
- Catering options, whether free or paid for, must be available near the stables so that the grooms can access quickly.
- Takeaway options available throughout the day so that grooms can get food even on a tight schedule.
- A grooms' lounge with a microwave and fridge with fresh meals that can be reheated at any time.
- Salads and other healthy options provided.

# CONCLUSION

The responses to this survey show just how wide-reaching the welfare implications are for FEI level grooms when the catering provided at shows does not take into account their schedule and needs.

It should not be normal for grooms to face dehydration and exhaustion simply because the catering is too far away from the stables, or they can't afford to buy food and drink.

The comments we received in the survey also reflect a widespread sense of marginalisation, with grooms feeling that organisers do not consider their needs, and that they do not have a route to share concerns and issues they might have at an FEI show.

When asked what they see as a minimum acceptable provision, very few grooms asked for the same food as the riders, they simply want accessible catering that helps them do their job well.

**There is a clear need to address this issue so grooms can access decent catering throughout their working day and better maintain their mental and physical health.**

**The FEI and the IGA are actively engaged in finding a way to implement the findings from this report.**





[internationalgrooms.org](http://internationalgrooms.org)