

Compassion in World Farming's position on calls for Defra's Minister Jim Paice MP to resign

Compassion in World Farming is the world's leading organisation dedicated to drastically improving the welfare of farm animals. Our vision is a world where farm animals are treated with compassion and respect.

Compassion in World Farming is appalled that Jim Paice has not responded to the extremely disturbing footage highlighted by Animal Aid and Sky News and various other media outlets on Friday 29th July 2011 which showed pigs being severely abused and mistreated in a British abattoir. We are also extremely concerned that Defra was reluctant to even view the footage, let alone prosecute, when the expose was revealed due to the fact that the footage had been gained by having used trespass.

Compassion in World Farming believes that the government is duty-bound to act on footage that shows welfare abuses regardless of how the information was obtained. Trespass issues should be overlooked if the footage provides evidence of serious welfare issues and contravention of the law. The footage is clearly in the public interest, as is the government's response.

Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive of Compassion in World Farming, said: "The fact that it was obtained without permission does not diminish the government's duty to consider credible evidence of possible breaches of EU legislation on the welfare of animals at slaughter and prosecution should be applied if this is uncovered.

I have written to Jim Paice calling on Defra to review the footage of the slaughterhouse in question and to prosecute those found to have breached animal welfare rules. The current situation whereby the government is refusing to view footage showing blatant animal suffering is a shameful abdication of responsibility."

In his letter, Philip Lymbery called on the Defra Minister Jim Paice MP to:-

1. Ensure that these employees are charged under the relevant law
2. Investigate the abattoir owners with a view to taking action against them
3. Ensure that CCTV cameras are placed in ALL places of animal slaughter. We are aware that selected slaughterhouses have done so or are considering it. The terrible acts of cruelty exposed in the film show clearly that it is essential to have well-monitored CCTV in all abattoirs so that immediate action can be taken if there are breaches of animal welfare law
4. Lobby the EU to bring in CCTV in all slaughterhouses across the Union as a matter of urgency
5. Identify further underlying failures in the system to protect the welfare of animals at slaughter and take appropriate action. At the very least, this is likely to identify the need for robust investment in training and monitoring of all personnel involved in the animal slaughter industry

Compassion in World Farming is not, as yet, calling for Jim Paice's resignation in light of some of the more positive initiatives he has put into place during his tenure. He has committed to a programme to address the cruel practice of beak trimming, whereby a hen's beak is painfully mutilated without anaesthetic with a view to banning it by 2016 and has stood firm on ensuring barren battery cages are banned across Europe by January 2012. He also went further than required under EU law to ensure that meat chickens have a little more space in their crowded sheds.

Apart from our concerns over Defra's failure so far to act on the illegal slaughter revelations, we have six other serious concerns around some of Jim Paice's policies which we are calling on him to reconsider without delay.

These are:-

- Cloning: The need for him to rethink his position regarding cloning where we believe he should take the lead in pressing for an EU-wide ban on the use and sale of meat and dairy products from clones and their offspring. Cloning of animals in this way has been proved to severely shorten animals' lives with many cloned animals dying very soon after birth.
- 'Sustainable Intensification': The need for him to stop calling on 'sustainable intensification' as a misguided answer to feeding the world. This is a euphemism for factory farming which is responsible for very poor welfare of animals and is dependent on using enormous areas of land to grow large quantities of cereals and soy solely for animal feeds. This is unsustainable in terms of water use, climate change and the effect on our environment. The answer is to eat less meat and for the meat we do eat to be ethically produced and not factory farmed.
- 'Mega-dairies': The need for him to come out against zero-grazing and the excessive milk yields that lie behind many dairy cow health and welfare problems. Science shows that the health and welfare of cows is improved by having access to pasture.
- Enforce the law: The need for him to properly enforce the EU Pigs Directive's prohibitions on routine tail docking and teeth clipping and its requirement that pigs be given effective enrichment materials such as straw. Currently such important laws are being ignored and the offenders are not getting reprimanded.
- Anti-biotics: The need for him to end the preventative use of antibiotics in livestock farming. This means that antibiotics would only be given to animals who are ill and require treatment. Such a step will ensure that human health is not compromised through widespread antibiotic resistance.
- Stop rewarding bad practice in terms of animal welfare: The need for him to take the lead in pressing for the Common Agricultural Policy funding (CAP) to help UK and EU agriculture move away from industrial livestock production towards humane, sustainable forms of husbandry.

Compassion in World Farming has in June 2011 been voted Campaigner of the Year for The Observer's Ethical Awards in which the charity managed to successfully block the UK's first 'mega-dairy' at Nocton, Lincolnshire. Here 3,400 cows would have spent most of their lives indoors had the charity, their supporters and Compassion's successful 'Cows Belong in Fields' Campaign not managed to stop it. Founded by a dairy farmer over forty years ago, the charity's mission is to end factory farming by 2050 and for farmers to use kinder more humane farming methods where animals are free to exhibit their natural behaviours and experience a better quality of life.

For interviews & footage, please contact Ashley Lovell, Director of Media – 01483 521992 – mobile 07584 392685.