

What does pregnant horses' blood have to do with intensive farming?

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Concealed from public knowledge and in production for over 30 years [1], pregnant mares' serum gonadotrophin (PMSG) is used to stimulate and synchronise oestrus in intensively farmed sows within days of giving birth. Another artificially inseminated pregnancy can then immediately commence. PMSG also accelerates puberty and increases litter size, thus significantly increasing pork production [2]. Since the "Vampire farms," were exposed by Animals' Angels Inc. [3], Tierschutzbund Zürich and Animal Welfare Foundation in 2015 [4], conditions have worsened [5, 12]. It remains unclear as to exactly how widespread the use of PMSG, also known as eCG (equine chorionic gonadotropin) [6], is in intensive animal farming, although it is available globally. The industry, with the majority of its horse blood farms in Argentina and Uruguay, makes multi-million dollar exports to the EU annually [7, 4].

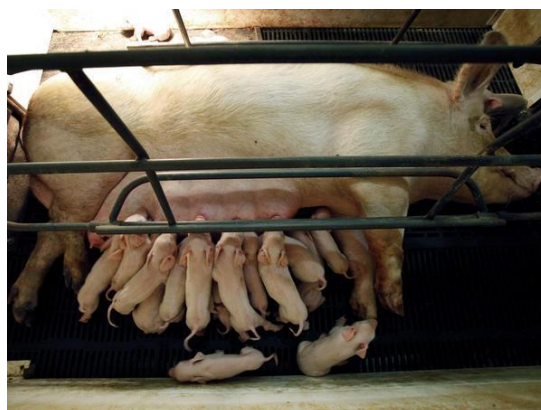
Whilst equine blood donor collection is legal in the EU for transfusion and research [8], the farming of pregnant mares' blood isn't. It's imported from non-EU countries. EU standards regarding equine blood extraction state that 3.5 – 4.5 litres per month are permitted [1]. The farms take 10 litres of blood from each mare at a time on a weekly basis for up to 11 subsequent weeks [1,4]. These ethical double-standards are undoubtedly economically driven. An EU ban on the import of PMSG would not be well-received by Europe's big pharma or meat and dairy industries. Also used to increase production in other farmed animals [4], PMSG is sold under many brand names including 'Fertipig' in UK, 'Folligon' in Belgium and 'Gestavet' and 'Pregmagon' in Germany [4, 9].

Hypocritically termed as 'donor mares,' there is nothing voluntary about the suffering of these sentient beings. Kept pregnant to maximise 'product,' their poor condition is intentional as the blood farmers know [1] that mares in early pregnancy who are underweight produce more PMSG [10]. Anaemia, collapse and death are common [1, 4]. The mares' attempts to avoid the blood draw stalls are often met with violence. Undercover footage shows them panicking and trembling, being beaten, kicked, punched in the head and stabbed in their vulva and anus with sticks and electric prods [4, 11]. Once in the stall, their haltered heads are tied tightly to the bars. Grabbed by their ears whilst cannulas are roughly inserted in to their jugular veins [11], they struggle, they try to escape, they fall, they are attacked and abused. After approximately 10 minutes, the cannula is roughly withdrawn and they are released. Footage shows mares staggering and collapsing after extraction, only to be beaten and forced to get up [4, 11].

There appears to be no care, only cruelty to a psychopathic level, physically, psychologically and sexually. It's all on tape [11] and cannot be denied. Foals are aborted by the farm workers, by injection in Argentina and manually in Uruguay without veterinary knowledge or anaesthesia [4]. They simply reach in to the restrained mare's uterus, bursting the amniotic sac; inducing miscarriage [11, 12]. Pharmaceutical companies recognise that profit can only be achieved by the farms if they cause the repeated abortions as PMSG is only present in the mares' blood during early pregnancy [1]. When the mares are 'rested' they are left to fend for themselves in remote pastures, without veterinary attention [1, 11]. Lameness, infection and emaciation are all documented, as are the corpses [4, 11] of mares who, whilst being the ultimate proof of horrendously poor welfare, are perhaps the fortunate ones as they no longer have to endure this living Hell.

So, what does this issue have to do with the need for urgent change in food and farming systems, particularly with respect to the intensive farming of animals? It has everything to do with it due to the use of PMSG in the intensive production of meat, especially pork as well as dairy. However, it remains a peripheral animal welfare issue with few realising the equine abuse involved in intensive farming. Some progress has been made in alerting the public with questions raised in the EU and UK parliament [12, 13, 14]. Whilst synthetic alternatives are available in the EU and some pharmaceutical companies no longer stock PMSG due to pressure from animal welfare campaigners [15] unfortunately, it's still legal so there is much to be done [12, 13].

Whilst the consumer-driven global demand for pork and dairy fuels blood farm cruelty, an EU-wide ban on imports would be a huge step forward in ending the misery of these mares. The combined exploitation of the females of these two species in the pursuit of profit and flesh, is without question unethical. One cruelly drained of her blood in order to force the other to reproduce far beyond that which her confined body can sustain.



Sow confined to farrowing crate to nurse piglets. Image: Charles Dan [16]

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