

The case for a foie gras import ban

Every year the UK imports around 180-200 tonnes of foie gras from mainland Europe. This makes us the smallest consumer market out of 10 importing countries. The trade repercussions of banning imports of this extraordinarily cruel product would therefore be low as producers would not be heavily impacted by a ban.

Less than 10% of the public claim to consume foie gras, as documented in a recent YouGov poll, carried out in June, 2018. The same poll also found overwhelming support for an import ban, with 79% of those who expressed an opinion supportive of a ban.

Foie gras is currently sold by only a handful of high end retailers and delis such as Fortnum and Mason and Harrods, and served in opulent restaurants to a minority of British consumers.

Britain is of course a nation of animal lovers, and has historically set a shining example to the rest of the world in pushing for animals to be regarded as sentient beings and not merely as commodities. We were the first country in the world to introduce an animal welfare law and numerous other pieces of legislation that enhance protection of animals in our country, since. It follows then that the production of foie gras is banned in this country under the Animal Welfare Act, but flies in the face of public opinion and our British values that importing this cruel product into the UK is still very much legal.

If foie gras production is banned here on animal welfare grounds, importing it should be too; and the public agrees. More than 136,000 people have now signed Animal Equality's petition asking the Government to ban foie gras imports upon our exit of the EU. <https://animalequality.org.uk/foie-gras/>

The UK's departure from the European Union, and associated freedom to change trade regulations, provide a unique opportunity for us to rid Britain of this extraordinarily cruel product, as trade regulations imposed by the EU will no longer prevent a ban being put in place.

Foie gras production

Animal Equality investigators have documented extreme cruelty and suffering on more than a dozen foie gras farms in France and Spain. The outcome of their investigations can be found at <http://www.foiegrasfarms.org/>.

In August, 2018 the team visited a French foie gras farm documenting yet more suffering first-hand. If [this](#) is the most humane way foie gras can be produced, what they are happy to put on display to families, it has no place on any British menu.

Foie gras is a so-called 'delicacy', similar to pâté. It is made from the diseased livers of ducks or geese who have been repeatedly force-fed maize by inserting a metal tube down their throats 2-3 times a day; a process known as 'gavage'. This process begins when the birds are 12 weeks old, and continues for 2 weeks before

the birds are slaughtered and their engorged, fatty liver is extracted. During this force feeding stage, the birds are kept in barren, wire cages. They are prevented from performing any kind of natural behaviour.

Powered by a pneumatic or hydraulic pump; each bird receives 180 to 200g of maize per meal, increasing to 450g (1000g after water is added to make a mash) per meal towards the end of the force feeding stage. This is vastly more food than they would naturally choose to eat.

Foie gras producers are regulated by [European legislation on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes](#). This directive transposes the principles of the [European Convention on the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes](#) of 1976. In particular this regulation lays down that “the freedom of movement appropriate to an animal, (...), shall not be restricted in such a manner as to cause it unnecessary suffering or injury” and that “No animal shall be provided with food or liquid in a manner (...) which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury”

The European Federation of Foie Gras claims that “if performed by professionals under regulated conditions, gavage does not cause any suffering to the animals”. This is disproven by Britain’s preeminent animal welfare expert Professor Donald Broom, and others. As well as by investigations by groups such as Animal Equality, who has documented the suffering birds endure on more than a dozen Spanish and French farms, including untreated injuries, dead birds in cages with the living, conditions that prevent any natural behaviour and animals in constant and extreme pain.

It is well researched and evidenced that force-feeding is aversive, and causes high mortality compared with other types of systems. Force-feeding an unbalanced diet in large amounts causes significant liver disease, oesophagitis and leads to other abnormalities, such as gait disturbances- a clear indicator of poor welfare in farmed poultry, wing lesions, and bone disease which can cause fractures. Contact dermatitis, a painful skin condition, is widespread, often severe and present throughout foie gras production, beginning in the early stages.

Mulard ducks are most commonly used to produce foie gras despite being fearful of humans, nervous and sensitive to their environment, making the conditions of foie gras production especially stressful. When group-housed they keep away from the force-feeder and have to be rounded up and immobilised with crowd-gates in order to be force-fed. The large amount of high energy food force-fed to them, causes them to overheat and spend a large proportion of their time panting to attempt to thermo-regulate. Housing on foie gras farms is poor, with either small, barren group, or individual cages (depending on the production country) and bare mesh floors. Resting places, litter or bedding are not provided despite Council of Europe recommendations.

We must follow in the footsteps of countries such as India, where importing foie gras is illegal due to the cruel production methods. Government must represent public feeling by supporting a UK ban on the import of a luxury product that causes unnecessary, intense and prolonged suffering to millions of animals every year.

The Facts

Production countries:

- The vast majority of European foie gras is produced in **France- 13,843 tonnes** in 2016. Followed by **Hungary- 3605 tonnes** and **Bulgaria- 2700 tonnes**. Spain (450 tonnes), the Ukraine (140 tonnes) and Belgium (25 tonnes) are also producers. Outside of the EU, North America (USA, Canada, Mexico) and China also produce 450 and 500 tonnes respectively.
- Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, France and Hungary make up the European Association of Foie Gras Producers.
- Approximately 21,000 tonnes of foie gras were produced in the EU in 2016 (19,000 tonnes of duck foie gras and 2,000 tonnes of goose foie gras). Approximately 95% of the world's foie gras.

Countries consuming foie gras:

- France is also the main consumer- 14,570 tonnes in 2016. Followed by (from largest to smallest) Spain, Japan, Belgium, China, Hong Kong, United States, Germany, Switzerland, Israel and the **United Kingdom- 179 tonnes**.

Countries, states and cities with bans:

- **Luxemburg 1965** Luxemburg bans animal force-feeding, unless an animal's health specifically requires it.
- **Germany July, 1972** Germany bans force-feeding.
- Norway December, 1974: Norway bans force-feeding.
- **Denmark June, 1991**: Denmark bans force-feeding.
- Czech Republic 1993: The Czech Republic bans force-feeding, "particularly poultry in intensive farming."
- **Finland April, 1996**: Finland bans force-feeding "for fattening purposes."
- **Poland August, 1997**: Poland bans force-feeding "for the purposes of the fatty degeneration of livers."
- **Europe Union June, 1999**: The EU prohibits foie gras production in member states (effective from 2004, except where it is already "in current practice"), and calls for research into alternative techniques for its production that do not require force-feeding.
- **United Kingdom August, 2000**: The UK effectively bans foie gras production under an interpretation of its farmed animal welfare regulations.
- **Italy March, 2001**: Italy issues a legislative decree to ban foie gras production in 2004, calling force feeding "torture" and "barbaric."
- **Argentina August, 2003**: Argentina bans foie gras production, saying "force feeding must be considered mistreatment or an act of cruelty to animals, in this case to geese or ducks."
- **Israel August, 2003**: Israel prohibits the production of foie gras, commencing from 2005.
- **United States September, 2004**: California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signs into law a ban on the sale and production of foie gras commencing in 2012. **April 2006**: The city of Chicago bans the sale of foie gras, making it the first city in the U.S. to do so. **May, 2008**: The

City Council overturns Chicago's foie gras ban. **3 July, 2012:** California's foie gras ban takes effect. After the ban went into effect, poultry producer Hudson Valley Foie Gras, and others sued the state to invalidate the law, arguing that it was preempted by the federal Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA). In 2015, a federal judge agreed and overturned the ban. The state appealed and in September 2017, the ban came back into force and was upheld by the Supreme Court in January 2019 despite appeals for it to be overturned.

- **India, 2014:** A total ban on the import of foie gras is announced by the Indian Directorate General of Foreign Trade. India is the first country to enact a ban of this kind.
- **France, 2016:** Since January 2016, housing birds individually is illegal in France. They must be housed in groups of at least 3, although it is not clear how big the cages need to be or the limit on number of birds per cage.

Number of birds on farms

- Over 1 million birds die for foie gras every year.

The production process:

Foie gras production can be divided into three stages:

- 1) Chicks are regularly fed from the time of hatching until 6 to 9 weeks. They are initially kept indoors, sometimes on straw.
- 2a) The birds are then feed-restricted for a period of 3 to 5 weeks. This restriction may be in time (fed just once a day for an hour) or amount (fed a reduced amount of food).
- 2b) For the next 3 to 10 days, the birds are fed as much as possible. This is to dilate the oesophagus, stimulate digestive secretions necessary for large amounts of food, and start the process of fattening the liver. The liver can weigh up to 180g by the end of this stage, compared with 80g if a duck is fed normally.
- 3) From 12 weeks, force feeding begins until slaughter around 2 weeks later. A longer period that this would likely cause death due to liver failure. Force feeding results in an increase in liver size and fat content. By the end of force feeding, the duck's liver is 7 to 10 times the size of a normal one with an average weight of 550 to 700 g and a fat content of 55.8%. The average weight of a non-force-fed bird's liver is 76 g with a fat content of 6.6%.