

Rt Hon George Eustice MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
&
Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park
House of Commons
London
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Date: 26th March 2021

Dear Rt Hon George Eustice MP and Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park,

On 6th March 2021, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs sources confirmed that you, Lord Goldsmith, are determined to implement the ban on foie gras *'in the next few months'*. A spokesman from Defra also stated that it had always been clear that foie gras production *'raises serious concerns'* and that *'now our future relationship with the EU has been established, the Government is considering further steps it could take in relation to foie gras.'*

After Fortnum & Mason announced a ban on foie gras, you, Lord Goldsmith, also tweeted that *'Foie gras is unbearably barbaric. It's hard to imagine anyone could watch the process and still enjoy eating it.'*

Although we are thrilled to see this recent development, the longer we wait, the more these animals will suffer. Over the coming months, thousands more ducks and geese will endure torturous treatment for this cruel product. We, the undersigned - including cross-party representatives from each country within the UK, urge you to confirm specifically when and how you plan to write this legislation into law. Animal Equality remains available at your disposal to support throughout the process in order to ensure immediate action is taken for these vulnerable animals.

Animal suffering

The foie gras force-feeding process - also known as gavage - involves forcing a tube down the throats of terrified ducks and geese, to funnel inside of them larger amounts of food than they would ever willingly ingest.

There is an abundance of scientific evidence, including a study conducted by the University of Cambridge in 2015¹, showing that foie gras production by force-feeding generates severe physical and psychological pain for the animals involved, not only exclusively when the tube is inserted in their throats, but also during other times throughout their short lives. The production process causes their livers to swell to ten times their natural size, at which point the animal is slaughtered and their diseased liver is sold and marketed as foie gras.

¹ Professor D.M. Broom – Dr. I. Rochlitz – “The Welfare of Ducks in Foie Gras Production”

As you will no doubt be aware, the process of gavage is considered incompatible with the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act (2006), as well as The Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Domestic legislation states that:

‘Animals shall be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health, to satisfy their nutritional needs and to promote a positive state of well-being.’

And that: *‘No animals shall be provided with food or liquid in a manner, nor shall such food or liquid contain any substance, which may cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.’*

Animal health

We are bringing this to your attention as a matter of urgency, not only because this so-called ‘delicacy’ causes unimaginable suffering to millions of ducks and geese each year, but also due to the severe threat that intensive foie gras farms pose to animal health.

In the past months, we have seen the most far-reaching outbreak of bird flu (specifically the highly pathogenic H5N8 virus) throughout Europe in four years, with more than 3.5 million birds, including ducks and geese used to produce foie gras in France, having died since October 2020.² French producers called for a mass preventative cull of ducks living on foie gras farms, in an attempt to try to halt this virus that is currently searing through poultry farms in the South West of the country³.

We must treat this issue with the seriousness that it deserves. By importing foie gras into Britain, we are in turn enabling this cruel industry to continue to act as a breeding ground for disease, spreading amongst birds whose health is rapidly deteriorating due to the most appalling treatment, all to produce a ‘luxury’ product. We must take responsibility to minimise the threat to global animal health.

The solution

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights how our relationship with animals can have a huge impact on the entire world. Scientists estimate that 3 out of 4 emerging infectious diseases in humans come from animals⁴, as has also been the case in various virus outbreaks throughout history (such as with the 2005 H5N1 avian influenza and the 2009 H1N1 swine flu outbreaks). In his report ‘What the COVID 19 Crisis is Telling Humanity’, Professor David O. Wiebers, MD (Emeritus Professor of Neurology at the Mayo Clinic and Mayo Foundation) states that: *‘Our species has come to the edge of the cliff on these issues, and the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing us to make a choice between either changing our thinking and practices in these realms, or facing increasing destruction.’*⁵

² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-08/bird-flu-hits-foie-gras-farmers-as-lethal-strains-sweep-europe>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/08/calls-for-mass-duck-cull-in-france-as-bird-flu-hits-foie-gras-industry>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html>

⁵ <https://www.karger.com/Article/PDF/508654>

According to FranceAgriMer - a French Government agricultural body - the UK imports around 200 tonnes of foie gras each year⁶, with a select number of high-end retailers and delis profiting from this cruelty. By halting our support for the cruel foie gras industry, we are reducing the risk of further avian flu outbreaks, sparing 250,000 animals from suffering each year, and better aligning our imports with our existing legislation.

Furthermore, countless UK companies have turned their back on foie gras and through Animal Equality's ground-breaking investigations showing the harsh realities behind foie gras production, iconic art gallery the Tate Modern also dropped foie gras from its menu⁷.

We cannot wait a moment more. With cross-party political support and over 200,000 signatories joining Animal Equality's call for a ban, we urge you to make clear commitments to secure this ban as quickly as possible.

We urge you to act, in order to protect animal health and welfare, and defend public morality in British society.

The British public is expecting you to take swift action.

Your fellow political colleagues, including cross-party representatives from each country within the UK, support a ban.

You, yourself, have acknowledged the animal welfare concerns relating to this cruel product.

We call on you to secure this landmark achievement for animals as swiftly as possible. This long-awaited ban needs your immediate attention.

We, the undersigned, await further information from you regarding intended next steps and a clear timeline.

We look forward to receiving your response and Animal Equality remains available to offer support and consultation throughout the process.

Yours sincerely,



Abigail Penny, Executive Director, Animal Equality UK

Co-signed by:

⁶ <https://www.franceagrimer.fr/fam/content/download/34895/document/STA-VBL-FOIE%20GRAS-2014-11-18.pdf?version=3>

⁷ <https://animalequality.org.uk/news/victory-tate-modern-drops-cruel-foie-gras-from-its-menu/>

Hilary Benn, Labour MP for Leeds Central

Dr Lisa Cameron, Scottish National Party MP for East Kilbride - Strathaven - Lesmahagow

Wera Hobhouse, Liberal Democrat MP for Bath

Ben Lake, Plaid Cymru MP for Ceredigion

Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton, Pavilion

Jim Shannon, Democratic Unionist Party MP for Strangford

Henry Smith, Conservative and Unionist Party MP for Crawley

This letter is also supported by:

Sir David Amess, Conservative MP for Southend West and Patron of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, of which The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith is a Founder

Rt Hon Sir Mike Penning, Conservative MP for Hemel Hempstead and primary supporter for the Early Day Motion on Import and Production of Foie Gras⁸

⁸ <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57547/import-and-production-of-foie-gras>