

Rt Hon Steve Reed MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Open Letter: An Urgent Call to End the Use of High-Concentration CO₂ in Pig Slaughter

Dear Secretary of State

We the undersigned are calling on the UK Government to show leadership on delivering an end to using high concentrations of CO₂ for killing pigs. Millions of pigs every year endure pain and distress in their final moments due to the use of CO₂ to stun and kill these animals. It has been over two decades since the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC, now the Animal Welfare Committee) recommended a phase out; it is long overdue and pigs are continuing to suffer. Since FAWC first called for this over twenty years ago there has been little progress; however, recent technical advancements have now made this economically and practically possible. Animal advocates, scientists, industry and farmers now believe this is possible. This practice, used to stun/kill approximately 90% of UK pigs, is widely recognised as causing pain and distress before the animals lose consciousness. It is unacceptable that millions of pigs continue to suffer every year when viable, more humane alternatives exist.

The RSPCA has identified two clear pathways to improve pig welfare at slaughter:

- 1. Government to Change the law to allow gas to be used to stun, rather than kill pigs, as it is in the EU, making the use of alternative gases in the UK much more feasible**
- 2. Retailers and slaughterhouses to start commercial trials to develop a commercially viable alternative in the UK to facilitate a humane transition.**
- 3. Government to support slaughterhouses by funding the retrofitting of existing CO₂ sites to allow for the use of less aversive inert gases, such as argon.**

Progress towards these solutions has been slow since calls were first made showing voluntary market forces alone have proven insufficient to drive meaningful change. It is now imperative that the UK government, retailers, and industry stakeholders take decisive action. To make progress we are recommending:

- **The Government to set a definitive phase-out date** for high-concentration CO₂ systems. Without legislative intervention, inertia will continue to prolong animal suffering.
- **The Government** to change the law to allow gas to be a method of 'simple stunning' for pigs
- **Industry and retailers must take responsibility** by committing to trialling the retrofitting of existing chambers with alternative gases such as argon, and by working

towards the implementation of more humane stunning and killing methods in both existing and future facilities.

- **DEFRA should explore and invest in alternative stunning methods** to ensure new slaughterhouses meet the highest welfare standards.
- **Prioritising Government funding and support for retrofitting existing gas sites.** As only a small number of UK slaughterhouses use high-concentration CO₂, retrofitting is an achievable and impactful change that DEFRA should lead.

Animal welfare experts acknowledge that whilst gas-based killing systems can offer some welfare advantages over other methods, such as improved handling prior to stunning/killing, making pigs calmer and less stressed, the use of high concentrations of CO₂ remains an unacceptable compromise. The suffering endured by pigs in their final moments is unnecessary, preventable, and incompatible with the UK's commitment to animal welfare.

It is time for the UK Government, retailers, and industry to take a stand and act in the best interests of animal welfare. I urge you to commit to finding a humane alternative, set a clear timeline for phasing out high-concentration CO₂, and support the development of solutions that prioritise the welfare of millions of pigs each year.

A comprehensive approach to improving pig welfare at slaughter is needed, involving well-designed facilities, trained staff, humane handling, and effective stunning followed by swift bleeding. The UK has long been a leader in animal welfare standards. Now is the moment to demonstrate that leadership once again.

We look forward to your response and to seeing meaningful progress towards a more compassionate and humane future for pigs in the UK.

Yours sincerely



Shan Nicholas
Chief Executive
RSPCA



Philip Lymbery
Chief Executive
CIWF

CC: UK Retailers and Industry Stakeholders