



Live Exports

What do we mean by 'live exports'?

Live export is the transporting of living animals for slaughter or 'fattening' in another country.

Live exports – the facts

All varieties of farm animals, including sheep, pigs, cattle and horses are all transported across Europe for slaughter. Cattle and sheep are transported from Europe, Australia and the Americas to the Middle East for slaughter, often by ship, with transport taking up to 3 weeks.

Nearly three-and-a-half million live animals are transported annually from the EU to non-EU countries,¹ and 6 million live animals are transported annually across Europe, often travelling great distances in journeys lasting up to 70 hours²

The EU requires that animal welfare be considered in regulations relating to farm animals:

In formulating and implementing the Union's agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals.³

And yet, animals suffer during these journeys^{1,2}:

- Food and water deprivation for 4 hours results in vigorous attempts by cattle to obtain food and water
- Cattle become too fatigued to stand after 6 hours of transport
- Pigs suffer from motion sickness and do not travel well
- Extreme heat is often a problem for animals during transport, regardless of species, but this is particularly detrimental to pigs, as they cannot sweat enough to regulate their body temperature effectively
- Sheep show an increase in motivation to feed after just six hours of food deprivation and can take up to 44 hours to recover from just 4 hours of transport
- Animals are often transported in overcrowded conditions, without adequate food, water and ventilation
- Rough handling adds to the stress experienced by animals during transport
- Animals can become injured from falls, and risk being trampled

As we know from our own experience with foot and mouth disease here in the UK, the transportation of animals can and does contribute to the spread of disease.

The recent horse meat scandal shows that the transportation of animals across borders for slaughter and processing creates dangerously long and convoluted supply chains, difficult to regulate.

England and the rest of the UK has strict regulations relating to the slaughter of farm animals and their treatment prior to slaughter.⁴ These regulations are not necessarily matched in other countries, and there is no way to guarantee humane slaughter in other countries.

What drives the live export trade?

Despite the many problems associated with live exports, including breaching of EU regulations, it continues to be a huge industry. Why? Sadly, because there is a lot of money in it and for both governments and business, profit often takes priority over ethics. But this runs contrary to a report commissioned by the UK government in 1995, which stated:

Doubtless abolition of child labour in 19th century Britain could have been opposed on the grounds that it would have disadvantaged British manufacturers...but...the claims made upon us by ethical principles cannot simply be suspended where those principles seem to conflict with self-interest.⁵



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What are the alternatives?

Replace live export with the export of carcasses – animals slaughtered near to where they were raised do not have to face the problems associated with transport

If you are a meat-eater, consume more domestic, rather than imported, meat, thus reducing the need for farmers to export to make a profit

What does the Bible say?

A righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel (Proverbs 12.10)

The use of 'righteous', to be one who is 'after God's heart' is significant. If an animal's needs include food, water, rest, and freedom from pain, then live exports cannot be understood as anything other than ungodly and unrighteous.

And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you...also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them (Genesis 6.19, 21)

The Bible doesn't really deal with farm animal transport directly, as the movement of flocks and herds in biblical times would have been on foot, with human accompaniment, so the issues that we face today would not have arisen. The one exception is the story of Noah, in which animals have to be confined in a transport for their own safety. Noah is clearly instructed to keep them alive and to provide for their needs, and this should serve as the benchmark for how to care for animals in transport.

The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns (Deuteronomy 5.14)

The Sabbath commanded by God is to ensure rest for all – including domestic animals, recognising that they have needs and we have a responsibility to meet those needs.

Jesus' teaching in Luke 13.10–17 is also relevant here, as he uses the example of the welfare needs of animals taking precedence over Sabbath regulations to make the point that when we work to relieve suffering, we are doing the work of God.

The Bible also has something to say about putting money first

You cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6.24).

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6.10)

To be faithful servants of God, we must learn to put the welfare of his creatures before wealth – whether that is profit or cheap food.

What can Christians do?

- Pray – remember the suffering of God's innocent creatures in both public worship and private prayer.
- Get involved – join a peaceful, legal campaign, such as a petition, demonstration or boycott
- Support – there are charities, such as Compassion in World Farming and Animals' Angels (a Christian organisation), who are speaking with a prophetic voice and working to end suffering that deserve our support
- Make your voice heard – write to your MP and MEP to ask them to support bans on live exports
- Spread the word – tell friends, colleagues and others about the cruelty of live exports and ask them to get involved.