



Media Release

NPA and NFU urge Defra to convene supply chain summit, as pig industry faces collapse

The NPA and NFU have called on Defra Secretary George Eustice to call an emergency summit with the supply chain to find solutions to the ongoing and escalating crisis in the pig sector.

The call comes as the pig backlog is now estimated to be well in excess of 170,000 due to a lack of butchers in pork processing plants, and tens of thousands of healthy pigs being culled on farms by desperate producers who have run out of space.

In the first week of this year, some farmers reported that as few as 50% of contracted pigs were taken by processors. On average, 30% of pigs that processors are contracted to take from producers are not going into the food supply chain each week.

For many producers, this has been the case since last summer and the expectation is that, unless things change dramatically, the backlog and ongoing food waste will remain in place until at least June. Meanwhile, challenging market conditions, exacerbated by the costs associated with the backlog, record pig feed costs and falling pig prices, mean farmers have now been losing approximately £25 per pig for nearly a year.

In a joint letter to Mr Eustice, NPA chairman Rob Mutimer and NFU President Minette Batters said the situation was ‘deteriorating’ for pig producers and was ‘clearly not sustainable’. They said it was ‘totally unacceptable that processors continue to take overweight pigs that they contracted farmers to produce at hugely discounted prices’.

The letter said: *“The NPA and NFU are asking that you arrange a summit of the entire pig supply chain so that we can agree a plan to get these pigs off farms and onto people’s plates,”* the letter states.

The NPA is aware of 30,000 sows that have been lost from the English sow herd over the last six months, equating to around 10% of the herd, although this is likely to be an underestimate.

“We are aware of 40 independent farms that have left the industry already,” the letter states. *“All of these factors are taking a huge toll on farmers’ mental health as the crisis worsens every week, especially for those having to endure the trauma of culling healthy animals when there seems to be no end in sight.”*

Support package not working

While the NPA and NFU expressed gratitude for the industry support measures, which were announced in October last year and recently extended, they stressed that the measures are not working as intended and have failed to alleviate the backlog of pigs.

The NPA is aware of only 105 butchers that have, or are due to arrive, using the seasonal visa scheme, while it is understood that Defra has only received three applications for Private Storage Aid and that there has been no take up of the Slaughter Incentive Payment Scheme.

The NPA and NFU called on Mr Eustice to improve the visa application process to make access simpler and quicker in order to help reduce the backlog.

The letter also urged Defra to encourage retailers to collectively play their part in running marketing campaigns to increase British pork sales to help steer the industry out of this crisis. Only Morrisons and Waitrose have done this so far.

Mr Mutimer said: *“The situation is utterly dire on pig farms, both in terms of the backlog, and financially. We are already seeing a significant drop in breeding herd numbers, and we fear that if nothing changes, we could see a mass exodus from this industry over the next 12 months. Once we lose that production base, we won’t get it back.*

“We need some urgent solutions now, which is why we are asking Mr Eustice to bring everyone together – and soon – to discuss how we can all work collectively to prevent this crisis becoming a catastrophe for the British industry.”

NFU President Minette Batters said: *“The situation facing pig farmers across the country is absolutely devastating and is causing enormous emotional, mental and financial stress for these hard-working, farming families.*

“This is a situation completely out of their control and the fact we are seeing the first ever cull of healthy pigs in this country is absolutely heart-breaking for those farmers and all of us in farming.

“This has gone on for far too long. It is essential that the Secretary of State convenes this urgent summit to find solutions that can alleviate this crisis.”

Notes to editor

- You can read more details of the letter [here](#)
- You can read more details of the declining breeding herd [here](#)
- You can read more about the support package [here](#)

Pig crisis in numbers:

- 170,000 – Defra estimate of the numbers of pigs backed on farms on December. The number has increased significantly since then.
- 35,000 – the number of healthy pigs the NPA is aware of that have been culled and destroyed as a result of the backlog. The actual number will be higher.

- 40 – the number of independent farms that have left the industry.
- 95kg – current average pork carcass weights recorded, 9kg heavier than two years ago.

More information

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