

Euro Foie Gras' response to the debate that took place in the House of Commons on June 13, 2018, regarding a ban proposal on foie gras

Euro Foie Gras¹ respects the freedom of choice of each individual not to consume foie gras. However, Euro Foie Gras strongly condemns the ban proposal from MP Henry Smith for various reasons explained in the following document.

Moreover, Euro Foie Gras wishes to respond to remarks that were made during the debate in the House of Commons on June 13, 2018 and that demonstrate misconceptions and a clear lack of knowledge about the production of foie gras.

- 1) (MP Kerry McCarthy) Foie gras production is banned in the UK “because it is morally unacceptable and cruel”**

This is not true. The UK has never produced foie gras as it is not in its culinary tradition as it can be for the current producing countries, namely Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary and Spain. Therefore, as mentioned by Minister George Eustice, following the Recommendation of the Council of Europe adopted in 1999² which authorises the production of foie gras in the countries in which it already existed, the production was no longer possible in the UK.

- 2) (MP Henry Smith) Foie gras is “cruel to produce, unhealthy to eat and expensive to purchase”**

Foie gras is a healthy product, resulting from an artisanal and extensive production method. It originates from healthy waterfowl which are bred to spend 90% of their life outdoors and then fattened in a progressive and controlled way. During the fattening phase, two meals a day are distributed for a period of 9 to 12 days for ducks and 12 to 15 days for geese, after checking that the previous meal has been correctly digested.

Furthermore, the production process is adapted to the anatomy and physiology of ducks and geese. The anatomical characteristics of these animals - no glottis and an elastic oesophagus that can expand like a snake - allow them to swallow all kinds of prey such as

¹ Created in 2008, Euro Foie Gras brings together the producer federations from France, Hungary, Belgium, Bulgaria and Spain. While keeping their specificities, the federations have a continuous exchange of expertise and experience. Further information is available here: <http://www.eurofoiegras.com/>

² Recommendation adopted by the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes of the Council of Europe of June 22, 1999: <https://bit.ly/2Q5gaHl>

fish or frogs. Consequently, as confirmed by scientific studies³, the fattening of ducks and geese does not cause suffering to these animals.



Aged 2-3 days



Aged 2 weeks



Aged 4 weeks



Aged 10-11 weeks



Aged 11-12 weeks

Ducks' anatomy

³ Scientific studies have been synthesised by the scientists Gérard Guy (INRA) and Xavier Fernandez (ENSAT) in a document written in October 2013.

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Moreover, the European foie gras sector is proactive in the field of animal welfare. European foie gras producers have decided to go beyond their legal obligations by adopting a [European Charter on Breeding of Waterfowl for Foie Gras](#), and by working towards a common external certification approach. The French Interbranch Committee for Foie Gras, the *Comité Interprofessionnel du Foie Gras* (CIFOG), has launched the **initiative PalmiGConfiance** that aims to certify in a transparent and independent manner that all producers comply with good breeding practices.

As for calling foie gras “unhealthy to eat” and “expensive to purchase”, foie gras is indeed considered as a delicacy and usually eaten in small proportions during special events. Purchasing foie gras or not with considerations to price or nutritional values remains any consumer’s own choice. **Moreover, foie gras has high levels of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids, as does olive oil⁴, that have health benefits when they replace saturated fats.**

3) (MP Henry Smith) “The production of foie gras is undertaken in three stages, each more brutal and inhumane than the last”

Offering quality living conditions to his animals is a daily concern for any farmer of waterfowl. This is essential for the animals and a prerequisite to obtain a quality product. As mentioned above, **ducks and geese for foie gras production spend 90% of their lives outdoors**, with plenty of space and shadow. They stay outside until the fattening phase, at 12 weeks old, and, contrary to what Mr. Smith seems to have understood, feed by themselves until then. The food they are given before the fattening stage is, of course, adapted to progressively prepare them for that last stage. We do not see how those stages can be deemed brutal and inhumane considering those standards of outdoor and extensive husbandry are well above the average of animal welfare in European animal production.

4) (MP Henry Smith) “Research has found that in the production of foie gras, birds are confined to small cages with so little space that they sometimes cannot turn around. In some cases, dead birds remain in cages with the living”

This assertion is inaccurate. Mr. Smith mentioned the investigation work of the Animal Equality organization. However, the pictures shared by Animal Equality do not show foie gras production in Europe. Indeed, the pictures integrated in their latest petition⁵ show ducks in individual cages, **while collective cages are an obligation under EU law**. Those collective cages are expressly designed to allow birds to turn around and spread their wings and meet the requirements of the above-mentioned Recommendation of the Council of Europe.

⁴ Nutritional values of foie gras : <http://www.eurofoiegras.com/docs/valeurs%20nutritionnelles.png>

⁵ <https://animalequality.org.uk/foie-gras/>



Collective cages in the foie gras production

As for dead birds remaining in cages, this is, again, totally untrue. Foie gras producers, as should any farmer working in animal production, comply with strict hygiene rules.

5) (MP Henry Smith) “The ducks and geese display obvious respiratory problems, with evidence of trauma and inflammation of the oesophagus, recognised by blood stains on force-feeding tube”

The panting of ducks and geese in foie gras production is often used as an argument for supposed respiratory problems. Ducks and geese do not sweat like humans do. Instead and in the same manner as dogs, they pant to evacuate heat and regulate their temperature.

Regarding trauma and inflammation of the oesophagus, as mentioned above, fattening ducks and geese for foie gras production is an expertise done by trained professionals. Done correctly, which is the case in EU production, it does not hurt the animal.

6) (MP Kerry McCarthy) “Foie gras is a product of making the animal diseased”

This is not true. **Foie gras production is based on the observation of a natural phenomenon.** Migratory birds naturally stock fat in their livers. The fattening of geese and ducks for foie gras production is a mere reproduction of this natural, non-pathological, and totally reversible physiological ability. This has also been proven by scientific studies^{6 7}.

Selling products from diseased animals is moreover prohibited under EU health law and foie

⁶ Scientific study from Elisabeth Baeza, INRA Prod. Anim, 2013, 26 (5), 403-414.

⁷ PhD Thesis from Wittawat MOLEE, Facteurs de variation de la composition lipidique des membranes plasmiques des hépatocytes chez les palmipèdes : relation avec le rendement technologique des foies gras, S.E.V.A.B., 2006.

gras producers would stop the fattening phase for any bird that is not completely healthy.

Foie gras is a high-quality product, recognized worldwide, that demands high technical qualifications, in which producers pride themselves, there is simply no sense in trying to sell diseased organs.

7) (MP Michael Fabricant) “Is it not an irony that “faux gras” is available? Many chefs say that it tastes exactly the same as foie gras, yet the animals are brought up humanely and killed humanely. There really is no excuse for the import of foie gras.”

“Faux gras” is not foie gras. However, there is a distinction to be made between vegetal alternatives and other liver products. As Mr. Fabricant mentions animals being brought up humanely and killed humanely, we understand that it is to the latter that he is referring to.

“Fatty livers” that have been obtained without *gavage* is not foie gras. It is another kind of product (which is referred to as “foie fin” in French) that is also available to any consumers who do not wish to eat foie gras. However, it is not an alternative to foie gras as it does not have the same intrinsic qualities and, contrary to Mr. Fabricant’s affirmation, it does not taste the same. It would therefore be misleading for consumers to let them think that they buy and consume a similar product.

As for today and in the current state of knowledge, there is no real alternative to the method referred to as “gavage” that would address the three following considerations:

- The method should be respectful of the health and welfare of the animals
- It should be economically viable
- The product obtained via this method should present the same qualities as real foie gras.

Moreover, following the Recommendation of the Council of Europe, research into alternatives to *gavage* has been carried out for several years but they have been, for the time being, unsuccessful.