

PIG BUSINESS

By Tracy Worcester

www.pigbusiness.co.uk

As reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy will be debated in the European Parliament this summer, three MEPs Jose Bové, Dan Jørgensen and Janusz Wojciechowski invited me to screen my documentary Pig Business to inform their colleagues in the EU Parliament and Commission that 'cheap' meat would be very expensive if the factory farms were forced to pay the true costs of their production on animals, the environment, human health and rural livelihoods.



MEPs, Dan Jørgensen, Janusz Wojciechowski, Jose Bové, moderator Marek Kryda, and director Pig Business the film, Tracy Worcester, at the EU Parliament screening and event, February 9th 2011



Delegates question panelists after the Pig Business film screening

Jose Bové, once a farmer himself, has for many years opposed industrial agriculture and, after being arrested for dismantling a McDonalds hamburger outlet that threatened to destroy his local town economy, is now a member of the European Parliament.

As co-host of the European Parliament event in Brussels, Bové insisted we screen the full length version of Pig Business. I was sceptical that busy MEPs and officials would hardly bother to watch an hour long polemic revealing the true costs of factory farming, but to my



surprise the room was packed full with MEPs, European Council and Commission officials, environmental, health and animal welfare NGOs, and international press.

The event followed a 'winter of discontent' for pig farmers facing low supermarket prices for pork, high feed costs, a health scandal caused by animal feed contaminated with dioxin, and the recent discovery that flies are spreading antibiotic resistant bacteria from intensive farms to neighbouring urban areas.

Factory pig farm sheds with open lagoon in America



Following the screening and presentations from, a panel of experts, there was a heated discussion that reinforced the film's findings.

Andrea Gavinelli, Head of the Animal Welfare Unit of the European Commission, said after the event

"The screening was a moment of transparency and reflection. It brought a clear message about what is really happening that people don't know."



A recent survey found that 50% of consumers across the EU believe that pigs are 'fairly well treated' and have no idea of the horrendous conditions suffered by pigs in factory farms. ►

In a factory farm, pregnant sows live in a crate their entire life

I believe that pork should be labelled with the production method. As eggs must be labelled if they are from caged hens, why does the same rule not apply to pigs which are raised in concentrated pens? Consumers who have watched Pig Business say they will never buy factory pork again.

Not least due to the threat to human health as Coliin Nunan, advisor to the UK Soil Association, warned at the parliament event

“Human health is at risk because the routine preventative use of antibiotics in factory farms is causing an increasing number of diseases such as campylobacter and salmonella to become resistant to antibiotics.”

A month later a screening and panel discussion on Capitol Hill, Washington, sponsored by Congressman Dennis Kucinich and attended by two further Members of Congress, was packed with congressional staffers, NGO leaders and journalists.



Congressman Dennis Kucinich, sponsor and speaker at US screening on Capitol Hill, Washington

In his introduction Dennis Kucinich said, “We are here because of our awareness of the damage to our planet done by the uncaring interests who come together to produce these CAFOs. This film by Tracy Worcester and the participation of Robert Kennedy, Water keepers and all the environmental and farm activists here tonight, is going to help to create a broader environmental consciousness in this country which will produce the kind of action necessary to bring about the reforms that are critically needed to repair our relationship with nature, animals and the planet itself.”



Bobby Kennedy, Jr, speaker at Capitol Hill event, founder of Water keepers Alliance, and environmental lawyer



Tracy Worcester at the Pig Business screening on Capitol Hill, Washington DC

On the same day as the screening, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter announced the re-introduction of her bill to limit the use of antibiotics to when pigs are actually ill rather than as a growth promoter or preventative medication. Although adding antibiotics to pig feed to promote growth has been banned in the EU since 2003, it is still allowed in the US where 80% of all antibiotics are given to mostly healthy, factory farmed animals. Doctors and scientists are concerned that this practice is leading to new antibiotic resistant diseases which, like MRSA ST398, passes from pigs to humans and which a pilot study in Iowa has found in 45% of the workers and 49% of the pigs.

Co-hosted by Bobby Kennedy Jr, nephew of John Kennedy the late President, the Capitol Hill screening came at a time when the Environmental Protection Agency is under attack from a pro-corporate Republican-controlled House of Representatives and threatened with drastic funding cuts and reduction of its ability to regulate polluting industries.

Smithfield and other factory producers across the world store the waste in stinking lagoons and spray it on fields, a system which pollutes the rivers and coastline causing massive fish kills, and sickens neighbouring residents.



Smithfield open lagoon with dead piglet at Zabin pig factory in Poland

Robert Kennedy Jr an environmental lawyer and founder of Water keeper Alliance which monitors pollution from factory farms across the US and Canada, is in the film and spoke at the Washington Event. Many of his words were removed from the film as Smithfield Foods used the UK's corporate friendly libel laws to silence the truth, but much was reiterated at the event, ►

"This industry is a criminal enterprise, it cannot produce a pound of bacon cheaper or more efficiently than a traditional farmer in a free economy without breaking the law."

Both concerned MEPS and EU NGOs and their counterparts in the US, agree that subsidies and loan guarantees to factory farms should be scrapped and that small family farmers should be paid for the benefits they provide to rural communities and the environment.

Though the ban on sow stalls during pregnancy is to be partially banned in the EU in 2013, the US still allows them to be confined in steel cages so narrow that they cannot turn around. Some years ago Smithfield promised to ban sow stalls after a 10 year 'adjustment' period, but they have now reneged on this saying it would reduce their profit margin.

After the US screening I am now back in Brussels working on Janusz Wojciechowski's suggestion that we invite a few sympathetic MEPs and many NGOs to join us in compiling a declaration on the need for The Common Agricultural Policy to stop financing industrial farming, spend more on supporting traditional small and medium scale mixed crop and livestock farming along with laws to introduce method-of-production labelling.

Smithfield's exploitation of cheap labour and lax environmental standards in Poland gave it the competitive edge so many EU farmers must either get big and externalise their costs on to the broader community or get out of pig farming.

North Carolina, USA



In an extraordinary move, lawyers for a factory pig producer in the UK threatened to sue the organic certifying organisation,

The Soil Association, for libel unless they withdrew their objections that a planned 2,500-sow factory farm would pose a risk to neighbours' health because antibiotic resistant bacteria would escape from the barns and lorries transporting the pigs.



Sick pig in Smithfield Foods factory farm in Wieckowice, Poland

There are numerous scientific reports which support the Soil Association's concerns. In many people's minds, the libel threat confirmed

that corporate meat producers will use any methods they can to advance their business, in this case trying to use Britain's outmoded libel laws to suppress public debate by preventing criticism of factory farming and subverting the planning process.

Largely I am against giving powers to the EU Parliament and Commission to dictate rules on member nations. However, following the American model of allowing family farmers to be bankrupted by unfairly subsidised competition, when our DEFRA Minister, Caroline Spelman, argues that, Common Agricultural Policy support for farmers should be phased out, I am relieved that her free trade agenda will be over-ruled by the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Dacian Ciolos.

His proposals are to limit subsidies to industrial size farms and increase payments to smaller scale farmers. The latter's competitiveness is reduced by their obligation to adhere to higher EU hygiene standards that have been introduced to curb the inevitable problems on large scale intensive farms. These payments would also reimburse them for providing public benefits such as conservation of landscapes and biodiversity, which are not remunerated by the market.

Tracy Worcester with pigs at Hilary Chester-Master's Abbey Farm, Cirencester



However, I prefer an option supported by 350 groups across the EU in a coalition called FoodSovCAP. I believe that food and agricultural goods should be exempted from World Trade Organisation (WTO) global trade rules so that all nations and regions have the right to protect themselves from low cost, low welfare imports. Or that the WTO recognises that food imported to a region below the cost of production is 'dumping' and so must have punitive tariffs.

Farmers could then be protected from the vagaries of the global economy and produce food for local markets. The giants should be taxed to remunerate society for the true costs of their production and Governments should be allowed to procure high welfare and sustainably produced meat from local farmers for public services like schools and hospitals. ■