

CO₂ Stunning for pigs

– Specific Meeting on 1st March 2021 –

Main outcomes

A specific meeting on CO₂ Stunning for pigs took place remotely on Monday 1st March 2021, from 10:00 to 12:00, under the co-chairship of Ms. Annette Dresling and Mr. Jos Goebbels.

Participants: Link to the attendance [list](#) and antitrust Statement

1. **Welcome** - Approval of the [AGENDA](#), **GDPR** and **ANTI-TRUST STATEMENTS**. See meeting presentation [here](#)
2. State of play on the work being planned by the EU Commission or Parliament on CO₂ stunning. Information provided by the Secretariat

This pilot project is a proposal of COMAGRI – it will be funded from the 2021 Budget.

To date, the scientific partner is not identified: there will be a call for proposals (*a priori* after April) - at that time, all interested parties will have access to more information about the project.

Justification (COMAGRI)

Exposure to high concentrations of CO₂ as a stunning method for pigs is currently allowed under EC Regulation 1099/2009 and is being increasingly used across the EU. However, this method causes acute and unnecessary suffering to pigs. Despite the EFSA's recommendation to carry out more research on alternative methods, such research has been lagged.

Therefore, public research into alternatives that allow for better pig welfare at the time of slaughter and that can be used in industrial operations is urgently needed.

Objectives and expected results (COMAGRI)

Collection of information on the relevant socio-economic impacts of the most welfare-friendly alternatives, such as, but not limited to: investment and operating costs and return on investment required to shift to the new system(s); throughput per hour; meat quality and safety; occupational health and safety; sustainability.



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Comparative analysis of the alternatives investigated both from an animal welfare and socio-economic point of view in order to highlight the pros and cons of each alternative method under a common methodology.

All the results will be public – The action includes in particular:

- Publication of one or more scientific papers in relevant peer-reviewed journals.
- Technical factsheet for market operators.
- Organisation of a final conference presenting the key findings.

3. Present scientific knowledge and knowledge gaps

- DMRI Danish work (speaker: DMRI). Dr Dorte SCHRØDER-PETERSEN presented the results of a study she led. The main conclusion from that research is that CO₂ is not a perfect stunning method, but it is the best method available for high-capacity slaughterhouses. Full presentation in document [21458](#).

- Study from Wageningen University. Find the study [here](#). The conclusions are more or less the same. CO₂ stunning is not ideal but it is the best method.

Exchange of views

Discomfort in the first 20 seconds: does not mean necessarily pain, could be a physiological answer to the respiratory distress; does not mean necessarily consciousness - this aversion period also exists in human and veterinary anaesthesia; it seems that humans and animals are not aware of the situation. After loss of consciousness, some pigs get cramps (excitation). The cramps during the excitation phase can be absent, mild, or sometimes severe. However, it is important to stress that they are of no significance to animal welfare because the animals may be unconscious. However, it is important to try and prevent severe excitation in order to prevent blood splashes and other quality problems caused by severe excitation. Excitation can be improved or reduced by optimising the pre-stunning handling.

Question: how to objectify if the animal is conscious or not during the phase of aversion, excitation?

Other gasses: animals take time to lose consciousness and regain consciousness quickly (necessity to bleed very quickly).

Other method (magnetic...): main disadvantage = individual handling.

Feedback of experience: reduce animal stress is very important; for example, reduce human contact, reduce noise....

A scientific project could be: **how to handle the pigs to reduce the stress.**



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Have risk factors been identified as aggravating the aversion reaction? According to Temple Grandin, the genetics plays a role; according to the genetics, the aversion reaction is more or less important.

Reflection: to give something to animals before slaughter to reduce the CO₂ reaction (spray?..).

Some political voices wrongly consider that the CO₂ is not the right way to go to and that the electrical stunning is the solution. But by the moment, this method is not possible to put in practice in huge slaughterhouses. The workers' safety is a priority. Moreover, investments on new equipment are not an option.

As CO₂ stunning is not an acceptable method under a political point of view, more scientific evidence is needed.

4. Next steps and possible UECBV actions

- UECBV Secretariat will draft a letter to the EU Commission Services to show interest in the pilot project.
- UECBV Secretariat will organise an informal meeting with Commission Services (Mr. Denis Simonin is the relevant interlocutor on this issue and perhaps also Mr. Gavinelli, as proposed by Mr. Buhl). The meeting should be at least attended by: Jos GOEBBELS, Annette DRESLING, and preferable some colleagues from the Danish Agriculture and Food Council, Fabienne NIGER and Carolina CUCURELLA. The goal of the meeting will be to find out more about the Commissions intentions and in an informal way enlighten them about the current facts regarding CO₂ stunning.
- The preparedness for the meeting will focus on what are the topics to be discussed and what are not. The group agreed that the UECBV should be part of the new project; at least in the board group and maybe also in the technical group assuming that the project will include such groups.

5. AOB

- ✚ **Animal welfare and Meat Quality.** See link [here](#). The Spanish member (ANICE) asked the other members on the Research project but members have no more information on it.

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