

New film: PMSG blood hormone comes under fire

Reprieve until 2025 for blood farms in Iceland?

Animal welfare organisations, businesspeople and tourism experts call for an end to Iceland's blood farms

Freiburg, 23/3/2023. In a documentary by Germany's Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) and Tierschutzbund Zürich (TSB), business, tourism, breeding and research experts criticise the extraction and use of the blood hormone PMSG. This fertility hormone has been used for over 40 years, mainly in industrial piglet production. Professor Axel Wehrend, a reproductive physician at Justus Liebig University in Giessen, believes that using PMSG is no longer in keeping with the times. "The programmes used in piglet production today go back mainly to research in former East Germany. That's when piglet production underwent a transition from family farming to industrialised production." Jóhannes Þór Skúlason, director of the Icelandic Tourism Association, thinks blood production damages Iceland's image as a country of horses and therefore harms the tourism sector. Gunnar Sturluson, President of the FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations), calls for a ban on PMSG production.

Sixty-six percent of Iceland's population are against the extraction of PMSG on blood farms, according to a public survey conducted in December 2021. The debate was triggered by the film *Iceland – Land of the 5,000 blood mares*, which was the first report by AWF and TSB in winter 2021. The new film, *Iceland – the hidden blood business*, looks at the latest developments in the blood business since the first film was made. AWF and TSB try to engage with supporters and opponents. "The blood farmers are becoming more and more secretive and a wall of silence has built up," says Sabrina Gurtner, AWF project manager, summarising her experiences in Iceland in August 2022.

Arnthor Gudlaugsson, manager of pharmaceutical business Isteka, was not available for comment. In his company's 2022 annual report, he writes of damage to the business. "The amount of blood collected this year was a quarter lower than in 2021 (...) One reason for this reduction is believed to be the difficult staffing situation among vets, but the flexibility of other vets and the employment of foreign vets prevented greater damage..."

Press release 23.3.2023

Enquiries: Sabrina Gurtner, AWF project manager,
T. + 41 (0)44 482 0492, s.gurtner@awf-tsb.org

Sigurborg Daðadóttir, chief veterinarian at the regulatory authority MAST, was willing to talk. She admits: “I doubt anyone would have done the things in the video if an inspector had been there.” She also confirms that to date, “Isteka itself has measured blood levels.”

Iceland’s government has issued a new regulation and will decide on the future of the blood business in 2025. Until then they intend to collect the data needed. But the pressure the government is under from pharmaceutical company Isteka became clear even as this regulation was being drafted. Its first version, for instance, ordered a reduction in blood collection frequency from eight to six times for each pregnancy. But the regulation now in force reinstates a frequency of eight blood collections, as requested by Isteka.

“The only thing the regulation does is to legalise things the way they’ve been done in the past. Now all they need is a permit. For the animals, nothing has changed,” says Björn Sigurjónsson, lawyer and co-founder of the new Animal Welfare Iceland, who is critical of the government.

“Foreign lobby groups such as sheep and pig farmers from France, Spain, Italy and elsewhere submitted statements about the bill because they were against it. That kind of thing never happens in such a small country and it proves the scale of the problem,” explains Inga Sæland, Member of the Parliament of Iceland.

In the EU, which is the main market for Iceland’s PMSG blood hormone, resistance against its import and use has been forming for years. Meura Haflinger Stud in Thuringia, for example, ended its production in 2022, and the Argentinian pharmaceutical company Syntex S.A. has halted distribution of its PMSG product Fixplan until further notice. The European Parliament also calls for a ban on PMSG. Tilly Metz, President of the European Parliament’s Intergroup on Animal Welfare, stresses: “Having this footage and making it available to the public is hugely important, as is campaigning for both a halt to production and a ban on PMSG imports.”

About the film:

New - Long version 2023: **Iceland – The hidden blood business**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scu2BLJ4KGs



New - Short version 2023: **Iceland – The hidden blood business**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVyRVKWQt2Y



Press release 23.3.2023

Enquiries: Sabrina Gurtner, AWF project manager,
T. + 41 (0)44 482 0492, s.gurtner@awf-tsb.org



Long version 2021: **Iceland – Land of the 5,000 blood mares**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkHP65O4RUg



Contact:

Animal Welfare Foundation e. V.

Sabrina Gurtner

Tel. +41 (0)44 482 04 92

Email: s.gurtner@awf-tsb.org

Photos and footage:

Images and footage are provided free of charge.

Reproduction is authorised only if Animal Welfare Foundation's copyright is cited.

We would be delighted to receive a sample of or link to your publication.