



PRESS RELEASE

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## Joint Letter to Michael Gove Urges Action to Save Small Abattoirs

Thirty-four organisations, reflecting a wide range of food, farming, consumer and nature conservation interests have written to Defra's Secretary of State, Michael Gove, asking him to take urgent action to save the UK's network of smaller abattoirs, which are closing at an alarming rate.

The group ranges from the RSPB, National Trust and RSPCA to the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Women's Institute and the National Sheep Association. In the letter they point out that the existence of a network of smaller abattoirs enabling thousands of family farmers to supply meat and other livestock products to a growing number of customers, either directly or via retail and catering outlets, represents a huge national asset.

The Government has indicated that it prefers farm animals to be slaughtered close to the place of production [1], yet the statistics show that the opposite is happening. A third of small abattoirs have closed in the past ten years and closures are continuing [2]. A further 6 (10%) of small abattoirs have closed in the last twelve months, with the latest, Bakers of Nailsea, which has been serving farmers and butchers in Somerset for 120 years, closing its door for the final time during the last month.

Patrick Holden, Chief Executive of the Sustainable Food Trust, said, "The sale of locally-produced meat helps to keep many family farmers in business and has huge benefits for

consumers and the environment. For the first time in my farming lifetime, Defra is genuinely striving to develop a more sustainable food system with additional focus on animal welfare. But that could come unstuck if we lose more local abattoirs. Without local slaughtering there will be no traceable local meat, it's as simple as that."

John Mettrick, Chairman of National Craft Butchers and owner of a small abattoir in Derbyshire [3], said, "We have hit a perfect storm of problems: increased costs, rock bottom prices for hides and skins, some gold-plated regulations, and excessive paperwork, much of it involving unnecessary duplication."

Sara Jane Staines of the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts said, "We need to be able to fly the flag for less but better-quality meat with a known provenance. We can't do that without accessible abattoirs across the country."

Michael Gove has acknowledged the problem facing producer-retailers who lose their local abattoir [4]. The signatories of the joint letter now want him to take urgent action to help the smaller abattoir sector, which is in danger of further contraction. This would include setting up a group to advise on how best to resolve the regulatory and other problems besetting smaller abattoirs in order to ensure their continued survival.

The Campaign for Local Abattoirs, [5] which coordinated the joint letter, was established by the Sustainable Food Trust and National Craft Butchers to highlight the current crisis in the supply of local meat.

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**Notes for editors**

[1] In Defra's consultation, 'A call for evidence on controlling live exports for slaughter and to improve animal welfare during transport after the UK leaves the EU', it states, "The UK Government would prefer animals to be slaughtered close to the point of production," <https://bit.ly/2v7hZxr> [see point 9, page 2].

[2] The Sustainable Food Trust's report '[A Good Life and a Good Death](#)' sets out the statistics and situation facing smaller abattoirs. Further information is available at <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/key-issues/campaign-for-local-abattoirs/>

[3] John Mettrick and his abattoir featured in the landmark BBC Series 'Kill it, Cook It, Eat It', during which the slaughter of animals was shown live on TV and discussed with an audience.

[4] At the recent Hay Festival, Michael Gove was asked by a member of the audience what the solution was to the problem, to which he replied, "The solution, in a nutshell, is to build more small abattoirs."

[5] Further information on the Campaign For Local Abattoirs is available here: [www.localabattoirs.com](http://www.localabattoirs.com); [enquiries@localabattoirs.com](mailto:enquiries@localabattoirs.com)

[6] For further information: On 3 July, members of the Campaign for Local Abattoirs gave presentations to a well attended meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, chaired by Lord Trees. The cross-party MPs and Peers and the stakeholders present expressed significant support and interest in helping Defra find solutions to the problems facing smaller abattoirs.