



January 6, 2022

OPEN LETTER FROM VETERINARIANS AND ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS TO THE AMERICAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

In 2020, hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – of farmed animals were killed by purposely inducing heatstroke, using a method called “Ventilation Shutdown Plus” (VSD+). Thousands of pigs were sealed in barns, the ventilation was turned off, and heat and steam were pumped in, raising the temperature to as high as 170°F, essentially baking the animals to death and causing prolonged and unimaginable suffering.ⁱ All this occurred because slaughterhouses were shut down due to COVID-19 and the pork industry was unprepared for supply chain disruptions.

All veterinarians take an oath to prevent and relieve animal suffering. As such, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) campaigns to prevent heatstroke in dogs left in hot cars. Yet, the AVMA’s permissive position on VSD+ has allowed corporations that carry out mass killing via heatstroke to claim they are using “veterinary-approved” methods. Despite sustained outcry from its members and the enormous emotional toll VSD+ takes on pig veterinarians and pig farm workers, the AVMA has yet to change its stance on this internationally condemned method of “depopulation.”ⁱⁱ⁻ⁱⁱⁱ

We urge the AVMA to revise its depopulation guidelines to reclassify VSD+ as “not recommended.” Both its Euthanasia and Depopulation Guidelines include numerous alternative methods, including some designated as preferred options. We also call on the organization to engage animal agribusiness in emergency planning and advocate for using and developing alternatives to VSD+.^{iv-v} The AVMA must also consider how common animal rearing practices, such as high stocking densities, increase the risk of future depopulations. Lack of preparation is no excuse for severe and protracted animal suffering. And it is not just animals suffering: a recent letter to JAVMA reports that ten percent of pig veterinarians involved in depopulation are considering suicide, and 23 percent need, yet are not receiving, mental health care.^{vi} Clearly, the urgency of this matter cannot be overstated.

As organizations who are proud to contribute to the noble profession of veterinary medicine, we are disheartened that the organization that purports to be the “collective voice of the veterinary profession” is not demonstrating leadership when it comes to ensuring the welfare and humane care of our nation’s farmed animals. All veterinarians take an oath to prevent and relieve animal

suffering, and more than 1,500 veterinarians have already signed a petition urging the AVMA to take a stand against these cruel methods. We join them in calling on the AVMA to do better.

Sincerely,

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Animal Welfare Institute
The Humane Society of the United States
Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association
MightyVet
Our Honor
Veterinarians Against Ventilation Shutdown

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ⁱ Baysinger, A., Senn, M., Gebhardt, J., Rademacher, C., & Pairis-Garcia, M. (2021). A case study of ventilation shutdown with the addition of high temperature and humidity for depopulation of pigs. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 259(4), 415–424. <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.259.4.415>

ⁱⁱ EFSA Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW), Saxmose Nielsen, S., Alvarez, J., Bicout, D. J., et al. (2020). Welfare of pigs during killing for purposes other than slaughter. *European Food Safety Authority Journal*, 18(7), e06195. <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2020.6195>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Arruda, A. G., Beyene, T. J., Kieffer, J., Lorbach, J. N., Moeller, S., & Bowman, A. S. (2020). A Systematic Literature Review on Depopulation Methods for Swine. *Animals (Basel)*, 10(11), 2161. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10112161>

^{iv} Grandin T. (2021). Methods to Prevent Future Severe Animal Welfare Problems Caused by COVID-19 in the Pork Industry. *Animals : an open access journal from MDPI*, 11(3), 830. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11030830>

^v Liss, C. & Reyes-Illg, G. (2021, October). *Letter from the Animal Welfare Institute to the American Veterinary Medical Association*. <https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/AWI-Letter-AVMA-Depopulation-Panel-Oct-2021.pdf>

^{vi} Baysinger, A., Senn, M., Gebhardt, J., Rademacher, C., & Pairis-Garcia, M. (2021). Author's response [Reply to Letters to the Editor]. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 259(10), 1103-1104. <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.259.10.1102>