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# Production of PMSG in Uruguay and Argentina

Sabrina Gurtner, Project Manager TSB | AWF  
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# What is PMSG?

- PMSG = Pregnant Mare Serum Gonadotropin, also known as eCG = equine Chorionic Gonadotropin
- Hormone found in mares' blood between days 40 and 130 of pregnancy
- PMSG is used to induce and synchronise oestrus in farm animals, particularly pigs
- Some PMSG products can also be used in horses, e.g. Folligon
- Side effects in pigs: larger litter sizes & induction of puberty



# Findings of investigations

- In Argentina and Uruguay, PMSG production is in a legal grey area
- Mares are impregnated and their foals aborted twice a year
- Ca. 10 litres of blood are drawn every week, for up to 11 subsequent weeks (EU standards would allow a maximum extraction of 3.5-4.5 litres/month)
- Mares often suffer from anaemia, emaciation, deficiency diseases
- Every year about 30% mares drop out of the production process: either die on pastures or are sold for slaughter
- Mares are kept on remote pastures and forest plantations without veterinary supervision



# Mares on blood farm pastures



# Abortions

- Pharma companies: blood farms cannot be operated profitably without abortions
- PMSG is only found in the blood of mares during early pregnancy
- The foals are an unwanted by-product, they are systematically aborted so that the mares can be impregnated twice a year
- Manual abortion described by Dr Perdigon, a blood farmer: *„pregnancy was interrupted by digital puncture of the fetal membranes with previous manual dilation of the cervix”* (source: Journal of Equine Veterinary Science, 2016)
- German veterinary association: *„The induction of abortions is fundamentally unacceptable.”* (source: BPT, 2016)



# Handling of blood mares

- More than 10,000 mares are systematically abused to produce PMMSG
- Mares are untamed and not used to human handling
- Handling during blood extraction is extremely violent
- Mares are forced into restraint boxes with wooden sticks, metal rods with hooks, and ropes (i.a. hit and poked into their genitals)
- Cannulas are inserted into the jugular vein by non-veterinary staff
- Mares are frightened, they panic and struggle
- New footage taken by covert cameras in 2 blood farms shows that the brutality is still the same or even worse



# Mares deliberately kept in bad condition

Statement of two blood farmers quoted in a scientific report:

Where considerable differences in feed availability and intake occur in the extensively managed groups of mares between years, **overall eCG production is invariably higher in leaner years when the mares are in light-to-poor condition in early gestation** (G. Maruri and M. Bocking, personal communication).

Source: S. WILSHER and W. R. ALLEN, Factors influencing equine chorionic gonadotrophin production in the mare, Equine vet. J. (2011)



# International public awareness

- Critical media reports about PMSG in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, UK and Spain
- Leading Swiss supermarkets made it clear that they do not want PMSG in their meat supply chain for ethical reasons (source: SRF, 2015)
- Swiss pig breeders' and veterinary associations called on all pig breeders and veterinarians to stop using PMSG (source: Suisseporcs, 2015)
- German veterinary association called on pharma companies to ensure that EU welfare standards are respected (source: BPT, 2016)





# Political decisions

The **EU Parliament** (10.03.2016) and **German Conference of Agriculture Ministers** (15.04.2016)

- do not accept the cruel PMSG production method utilised in third countries
- decided that the production of PMSG should comply with **EU animal welfare standards**, and that the possibility of a **ban on the import and use of PMSG** should be examined



# Success so far

- The use of PMSG in Switzerland has dropped by ~80% since our first publication in 2015 (Maprelin is now used in pigs)
- In 2017, pharma company MSD Animal Health stopped importing PMSG from South American suppliers who failed to meet minimum animal welfare requirements
- Legal complaint against IDT Biologika (German company) is pending



# Importers

The main importers of PMSG from South America are:

- CEVA based in France, with branches all over Europe
- HIPRA based in Spain, with branches all over Europe
- IDT Biologika based in Germany
- Zoetis based in the USA, with branches in Europe

MSD is the only company that stopped the import. CEVA and IDT issued new manuals and carried out audits, and claim that animal welfare is now respected. HIPRA and Zoetis remain silent.



# Improvements possible?

- We do not believe that new manuals and audits can improve the situation, because PMSG is produced in a legal grey area
- Manuals are not legally binding and thus not enforceable
- Audits are usually announced, employees act differently when they are under observation
- Blood farms have thousands of mares, which cannot all be tamed and trained so that blood extraction is done without violence
- Effective supervision of mares is impossible as they are kept in groups hidden in remote forests and fields



# Goal of the campaign



## Europe

**Our aim is for the EU Commission to take all necessary measures to prevent the sale in the EU of PMSG products obtained through a cruel production method.**

However, the Commission does not currently plan to ban the import of PMSG.

## South America

Our ultimate aim is to close down all blood farms with the help of local animal welfare NGOs.



# Reasons to ban PMSG

- In the EU, such a cruel production method would be prohibited, however Uruguay and Argentina tolerate it
- Even if animal welfare standards were introduced on blood farms, it is impossible to monitor their implementation in South America
- The business was deliberately moved from the EU (Netherlands) to countries with insufficient animal welfare regulations, away from the control of the EU
- Side-effects of PMSG are detrimental to pigs' welfare
- Synthetic alternatives are already available



# Synthetic alternatives

- Different synthetic alternatives to PMSG are available on the EU market, and have none of the adverse side effects of PMSG in pigs (larger litter sizes, induction of puberty)
- According to the German Ministry of Agriculture, there are 36 veterinary drugs available in Germany for different animal species which can be used as an alternative to PMSG
- Several alternatives available to induce oestrus in horses



# How FEEVA can support the campaign against PMSG

- Publish a position paper against the use of PMSG, or a press release
- Promote the use of synthetic alternatives among FEEVA's members
- Inform other veterinarians specialized in farm animals about the cruel production of PMSG





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Thank you for your attention  
**Any questions?**

[sabrina@tierschutzbund-zuerich.ch](mailto:sabrina@tierschutzbund-zuerich.ch)