

## Press release: Essere Animali forced to black out videos of investigations of two Grana Padano dairy farms

Bologna, 10th January 2022 - Following the release of two investigations of two different dairy farms where Grana Padano is produced, the Consortium that protects the most consumed PDO cheese in the world has filed a civil lawsuit against Essere Animali and filed charges against their legal representative and some other members of the organisation.

As a result of the civil proceedings instigated by the Consortium, albeit in the interlocutory stage, the Court of Brescia ordered the removal of all the online videos related to the undercover investigations. Additionally, the court prohibited the disclosure of any other footage or content from the investigations that involve Grana Padano. The only exception is the right to mention that the two farms involved are part of the Consortium.

We appealed the Court decision, asking them to reconsider the order of removal and to make the videos visible again online. But this is not all.

The Consortium for the Protection of Grana Padano has pressed charges against several members of our organisation, for different crimes including defamation and receiving stolen goods.

*"We know our investigations are troublesome, affecting the interests of powerful food groups, and we are aware of the legal risks we run. However, the need to improve living conditions for animals in factory farms drives us to carry out these investigations, and this is our primary goal. Attempts to intimidate us will not stop our work",* commented Simone Montuschi, President of Essere Animali.

### What happened: the first investigation

In recent months we have released two different undercover investigations carried out in two different farms which are part of the Grana Padano Consortium. The publication of these investigations, taken up by the media and other international NGOs, took place as part of the **European campaign "No Animal Left Behind"**, coordinated by Eurogroup For Animals, and launched to request that the EU institutions review current animal protection laws.

The first investigation, released on 13 July 2021, documented the cows' living conditions on a factory farm in the province of Bergamo. It showed operators' violent behaviour towards the animals, but it focused mainly on the conditions of the calves, which were separated from their mothers at birth and then locked up in small individual pens.

The treatment of newborn calves, i.e. separation from the mother and confinement in a pen until eight weeks of age, is permitted by law. However, several studies indicate that these practices are questionable, and are associated with behavioral damage in animals.

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Our appeal linked to the dissemination of the investigation carried a clear message: these cruel treatments take place for the production of milk. It is incredible that the current legislation still allows for the isolation and confinement of newborn animals, given that these practices are cruel and avoidable. Laws must change.

### **What happened: the meeting with the Consortium and the warning**

Following the dissemination of the first investigation, the Consortium for the Protection of Grana Padano replied with a video in which it distanced itself from episodes of animal abuse by referring to “isolated cases”. They said nothing about the practices of confinement and separation of calves. Subsequently, the Consortium proposed a meeting at their headquarters, during which we were asked to remove the references to the Grana Padano trademark from the video just released, without making any concrete proposals regarding the requests of Essere Animali and 78 other international NGOs part of **Eurogroup for Animals**.

In fact, although the “No Animal Left Behind” campaign targets European legislators rather than industries, the latter can certainly forge the path towards abandoning practices that cause stress and suffering to animals.

In addition to having informed the Consortium that we were not able to delete the references to the brand in the video from the investigation, we informed them that within a few weeks we would release a second video investigation carried out on another farm of the Consortium. A few days later we received a communication in which we were told to refrain from publishing videos or other content that made direct reference to Grana Padano PDO cheese.

### **What happened: the second investigation**

On 29 September we released a new video investigation carried out on a dairy farm producing Grana Padano located in the province of Brescia. In addition to the separation of newborn calves from their mothers and their subsequent isolation in individual pens, the video pictures a situation of extreme neglect and the presence of many dead calves inside the farm. The video was published in the UK by The Guardian, and in Spain by El Diario.

The police and official veterinarians, who intervened following our report, found several animals in poor conditions. The farm, on which violations of regulations had previously been found, was sanctioned almost **10,000 euros**, and was requested to adjust practices in accordance with regulations.

Our goals following the dissemination of the second investigation were clear. Firstly, we responded to the Consortium’s claims that described the first farm as an “isolated case” by demonstrating that some violations occurred on a second farm as well. Secondly, we sought to take up the demands of the “No Animal Left Behind” campaign to ask, once again, for a revision of the European legislation for the protection of calves.

### **The Consortium's legal complaint against Essere Animali**

For some months now, the Consortium for the Protection of Grana Padano has been attacking Essere Animali on several fronts. First they filed a complaint against four members of the organisation, for several crimes

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including defamation and receiving stolen goods. They then filed a civil suit at the Court of Brescia and successfully obtained — in the interlocutory stage — a ruling ordering the blackout of the investigations' videos.

The decision of the Court of Brescia supports us in various respects. The order reads: *“it is noted that the representation of the mistreatment of cattle and the poor health and hygiene conditions relating to the farms object of the investigations meet the criterion of truth. Again, the reference made to the fact that the farms belong to the Consortium for the Protection of Grana Padano is true”*.

Furthermore, according to the Court of Brescia, our organisation did not illegitimately exploit the reputation of the Grana Padano brand to gain commercial advantage, as the Consortium judges.

The Court of Brescia, however, accepted the request for the blackout of the investigative videos because they claimed we would have conveyed the message that *“the entire production of the Grana Padano brand cheese takes place in violent ways and in the conditions reported”*.

Instead, as we have specified in every video and in every press release:

- In all dairy farms, regardless of whether or not it is used for the production of Grana Padano, legal practices such as the separation of the newborn calf from the mother and subsequent isolation takes place. These practices cause the animals stress and suffering. Even though these practices are legal and common on farms, it is our right to criticise them and strive for them to be abolished;

- In the dairy farms investigated, we filmed violent behaviour towards animals, dangerous health conditions, and other violations. We have also filed a complaint with the competent authorities about these occurrences. We cannot say that these violations occur on most Italian farms, but this is what we have documented with worrying frequency.

### **Is our message misleading?**

**Advertisements** broadcast on televisions and newspapers throughout Italy show almost only grazing cows but, as indicated on the Consortium for the Protection of **Grana Padano website**, *“around 15% of the farms that deliver milk to the cheese factories which are members of the Consortium for the Protection of Grana Padano cheese use mountain pasture and grazing as an essential practice”*. The consumer is shown an image that suggests grazing is the primary farming method, when in reality it only represents a small percentage of the production.

*“If necessary, we will also defend ourselves in a criminal court, using it as an opportunity to talk again about the shameful conditions in which animals are kept in dairy farms. And, we will not hesitate to state that even in some factory farms that form the Grana Padano Consortium these practices continue to occur”*, commented Simone Montuschi, President of Essere Animali.

**ENDS**

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**Essere Animali** is an Italian animal rights organisation whose mission is to create a society where no animal is harmed or suffers unnecessarily. Essere Animali's work focuses on the food system and factory farming, both with individual outreach and by promoting higher welfare laws and corporate policies.

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