

Thousands of Brits sign up to save condemned alpaca Geronimo

August 6 2021

Tens of thousands of people in Britain have signed a petition to save an alpaca named Geronimo, who the government insisted Friday must be euthanised after testing positive for bovine tuberculosis (bTB).

The petition—"Save Geronimo—stop killing healthy alpacas without valid science"—has attracted nearly 82,000 signatures since his owner Helen Macdonald launched the appeal six days ago.

It calls for the New Zealand-born male animal to be re-tested using a different diagnostic tool, claiming two blood tests showing he has bTB are unreliable.

Macdonald, 50, a vet and alpaca breeder who has a farm in Gloucestershire, western England, argues injections of tuberculin given to Geronimo since he arrived in 2016 can produce false-positive results.

She has also claimed that no trials have been carried out on alpacas to assess the accuracy of the bTB tests carried out by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

"If he's willing to kill a healthy animal in front of the whole world without testing him properly first, then it's a sorry state of affairs," Macdonald said, referring to Environment Secretary George Eustice.

He has insisted the ministry uses "a highly specific and reliable test" and Geronimo must be put down.

Macdonald said a High Court judge last month dismissed her appeal and upheld DEFRA's verdict of "the suspicion of disease".

The court re-issued a warrant for the slaughter of Geronimo within 30 days of August 5, according to the petition, which claims Eustice still has the power to spare the alpaca.

Geronimo's plight has garnered increased attention with The Sun—Britain's top-selling tabloid—splashing the story on Friday's front page.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has even been drawn into the controversy, with his spokesman confirming that the British leader would not intervene.

"The Environment Secretary has looked at this case very carefully, multiple times over the last few years, and has interrogated all the evidence with expert vets alongside the Animal and Plant Health Agency," the spokesman said.

"We know how distressing losing animals to TB is for farmers and our sympathies are with Ms Macdonald and everyone with animals affected by this terrible disease."

However Macdonald has vowed to "stand in the way of any gunman who comes to destroy Geronimo" and as emotions ran high Friday accused Eustice of telling "total lies".

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