

[NEW ZEALAND \(/NEWS/NATIONAL\)](#) / [COUNTRY \(/NEWS/COUNTRY\)](#)

Covid-19 brings home the bacon for food banks

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The gruesome prospect of mass slaughters of pigs on farms because of over-supply prompted the government to buy 12,000 carcasses during lockdown - and donate them to food banks.



File photo. Photo: 123rf.com

Hundreds more papers related to the government's Covid-19 pandemic response were released today. One paper revealed Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor asked Cabinet to approve a \$5.8 million purchase of 2000 pigs a week.

With independent butchers, Asian retailers and the food service sector closed in lockdown, half the country's pork market disappeared overnight.

New Zealand Pork chief executive David Baines said the outlook was grim - both for farmers, and for their animals.

As officials noted in the paper, due to the nature of intensive pig farming and rapid growth, pigs quickly outgrow their pens.

Baines said many farms have weekly breeding cycles.

"It's not like red meat farming where you can just leave them in the paddock.. most farmers have weekly deliveries of pigs to go to market."

Supermarkets upped their orders - but that didn't come close to bridging the gap.

As well as the risk to animal welfare from pig pens bursting at the seams, the Government was also worried about farmers taking matters into their own hands.

A ham-fisted mass culling of animals by farmers who were "not equipped to do so" would likely attract "negative media coverage" - and a major public backlash.

The government came to the rescue, buying 2000 pigs a week for six weeks to cover processing and related transport costs.

The meat has been distributed - post lockdown - by the food charity Kiwi Harvest, which supplies 242 social agencies and hundreds of food banks around the country.

General manager Wikitoria Blandina Diamond said food donations took a massive hit in lockdown, with manufacturers closing down and empty supermarket shelves.

"Restaurants and cafes were shut down which would have otherwise provided us with some of their food that was still good for human consumption.

So, during Covid, we saw a real reduction in the food that was available to us despite the opposite happening with regards to hungry families.

Diamond said Kiwi Harvest has so far moved just under 600 metric tonnes of pork to 96 community organisations, which are grateful to receive it.

"We don't get much protein so to be able to get a product like pork and deliver 1.5 million meals to more than 530,000 people during that period is just such a big benefit to the community."

Baines said it's been a win-win.

"It was a great outcome in terms of moving pigs off the farm, but also placing it in food banks because we appreciate that there were a lot of people who were hungry and this provided a really great option, both for farmers and for the food banks."

Baines said the industry is exploring export options for pork in future, but due to New Zealand's high animal welfare standards compared with other countries, it was hard to compete on price with foreign producers.