

ALEC BALDWIN

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Animal advocates like me depend on the USDA to protect animals who are used for entertainment from lives of deprivation, pain, and abuse. For dozens of bears across the country, however, this protection is falling woefully short. I'm writing to you today to ask that the USDA recognize the cruelty and danger inherent in bear pits and ban this archaic form of confinement without delay.

Bear pits like those at the Cherokee Bear Zoo in North Carolina can cause bears to suffer from a psychological condition known as "zoochosis," in which bears pace or walk in endless circles out of sheer frustration and deprivation. Living on concrete slabs—as most of these bears do—can cause arthritis, pressure sores, and other painful, debilitating diseases. After PETA submitted a petition in 2012 calling on the USDA to ban bear pits, nearly 9,000 members of the public, including leading bear experts and veterinarians, pledged their support. Yet despite promising action in its March 2016 response to PETA's petition, your office continues to allow the Cherokee Bear Zoo and other exhibitors to subject bears to an existence completely at odds with their natural disposition and with the Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

Highly intelligent animals capable of empathy and a wide range of feelings, bears are active for up to 18 hours a day in their natural habitat and spend their time exploring diverse terrain. In the wild, bears forage for a wide variety of foods and dig in soft earth, brush, and leaves—but the concrete pits that bears are forced to call home deprive them of everything that is natural and important to them. Surrounded by four solid walls, they cannot scan the horizon, gain a perspective on their surroundings, or make much use of their acute sense of smell. Please watch this [brief video](#) I hosted for PETA about the plight of captive bears.

A statutory mandate of the AWA is to ensure that animals used for exhibition "are provided humane care and treatment." Furthermore, AWA regulations state, "Enclosures shall be constructed and maintained so as to provide sufficient space to allow each animal to make normal postural and social adjustments with adequate freedom of movement. Inadequate space may be indicated by evidence of malnutrition, poor condition, debility, stress, or abnormal behavior patterns."

There is nothing humane or adequate about bear pits. The USDA has an ethical and statutory obligation to ensure that exhibited bears are treated humanely, and until it does, bears languishing in concrete pits will continue to pay the price.

May I please hear from you that the USDA will ban bear pits now?

Very truly yours,



Alec Baldwin