

Animal Welfare Report 2024/25

FSA 25/09/06 - Report by Richard Wynn-Davies and Kevin Maher

1. Summary

1.1 This paper updates the Board on the FSA's delivery of animal welfare controls in slaughterhouses during 2024/25. It outlines the work undertaken to improve welfare standards in England and Wales. It reports (section 4) a reduction in animals affected by welfare breaches in slaughterhouses despite a rise in regulatory breaches identified. It also reports a rise in animals affected by welfare breaches on-farm and during transport and an increase in regulatory breaches referred to other enforcement bodies.

1.2 The Board is asked to acknowledge and comment on:

- Work and progress since the 2023/24 update to the Board.
- Ongoing work to improve animal welfare at slaughter, and the FSA's position on taking proportionate action against all animal welfare breaches in slaughterhouses.
- Work to enhance and strengthen collaboration with other enforcement bodies responsible for farm and transport welfare.
- The activities undertaken during and following an incident of covert filming footage which was provided to the FSA in February 2025.

2. Introduction

2.1 This paper provides the annual report to the Board on the FSA's animal welfare delivery on behalf of the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Welsh Government as policy holders for animal welfare in England and Wales, respectively.

2.2 The paper covers:

- Section 3 – Background and context
- Section 4 – Summary of animal welfare compliance data in slaughterhouses, on farm and in transport

- Section 5 – Progress of in year activities
- Section 6 – Data analysis
- Section 7 – Consumer and stakeholder interest in animal welfare
- Section 8 – Policy activity and forward look
- Section 9 – Conclusions

3. Background and Context

3.1 DEFRA and Welsh Government have policy responsibility for animal welfare laws in England and Wales for animals destined for slaughter covering farms, transport, and slaughterhouses.

3.2 Slaughterhouse operators are responsible for meeting all animal welfare laws and policies in slaughterhouses.

3.3 The FSA enforces animal welfare in slaughterhouses on behalf of DEFRA and Welsh Government, through Official Veterinarians (OVs) based on-site. In Northern Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) oversees policy and enforcement.

3.4 The FSA acts on every identified animal welfare breach in slaughterhouses. We apply a tiered enforcement approach. Minor breaches may lead to informal action, while serious or repeated breaches can result in formal measures such as written notices, suspension or revocation of slaughterhouse operative licences, prosecution, and/or removal of a business' approval to operate as a slaughterhouse.

3.5 The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and Local Authorities (LAs) enforce animal welfare laws on farms and during transport. Breaches identified by OVs in slaughterhouses are referred to them for investigation. The FSA leads a Referral Working Group with DEFRA, Welsh Government, APHA, and LAs to facilitate farm and transport enforcement and raise welfare standards.

4. Summary of Animal Welfare Compliance Data in Slaughterhouses, on Farm and In Transport

4.1 Overall compliance with animal welfare requirements remains very high across the sector. Over 1bn animals are processed annually in slaughterhouses, with only 0.0033% of animals detected as being affected by breaches of animal welfare requirements at slaughter. A slightly higher proportion, 0.1% of animals, are detected as being impacted by breaches of animal welfare requirements before arrival, occurring on-farm or during transport. When FSA inspectors identify pre-slaughter breaches, they refer them to APHA and LAs who are responsible for enforcement in those areas. Data is provided in Annexes 2 and 3 but in summary, for 2024/25, there were:

- 509 welfare breaches enforced in slaughterhouses affecting 33,920 animals
- 4,464 farm and transport welfare breaches referred to APHA and LAs affecting 1,073,102 animals

4.2 A breach can affect a single animal (such as an ineffective stun, or lameness) or multiple animals (such as lack of water in holding pens, or heat stress during transport) or could refer to a technical breach not impacting animals (such as a CCTV system, or slaughterhouse documentation).

Comparison of Animal Welfare Breaches – 2023/24 vs 2024/25

Category	2023/24	2024/25	Change
Animals slaughtered	1.009 bn	1.035 bn	+2.6%
Slaughterhouse			
Number of breaches	362	509	+40.6%
Level 3 breaches (potential welfare risk)	193 (53%)	251 (49%)	-4 ppt
Level 4 breaches (imminent welfare risk/impact)	169 (47%)	258 (51%)	+4 ppt
Animals affected	44,015	33,920	-22.9%
Farm & Transport (referred to APHA and Local Authorities)			
Number of breaches	3,556	4,464	+25.5%
Level 3 breaches (potential welfare risk)	35 (1%)	60 (1%)	-
Level 4 breaches (imminent welfare risk/impact)	3521 (99%)	4,404 (99%)	-
Animals affected	722,963	1,073,102	+48.4%

5. Progress of in year activities

5.1 The Animal Welfare Action Plan (summarised in Annex 1) is managed by the FSA and is monitored and endorsed by the Animal Welfare Steering Group, represented by FSA, DEFRA, Welsh Government, APHA, DAERA, and Food Standards Scotland. The Animal Welfare Action Plan seeks to improve animal welfare and enhance:

- verification and compliance

- accountability and collaboration
- education and instructions
- the quality of our analysis and reporting

5.2 In 2024/25 the FSA worked closely with Welsh Government in developing guidance and implementing Mandatory CCTV in Slaughterhouses in Wales Regulations. The regulations came into force on 1 June 2024, with a six-month period for slaughterhouse operators to achieve compliance. Enforcement was permitted by the regulations from 1 December 2024. By this date, 16 of the 19 slaughterhouses were fully compliant with the regulations. 3 slaughterhouses required low level enforcement: one verbal advice, one written advice, and one CCTV enforcement notice. Full industry compliance was achieved on 31 January 2025.

5.3 In October and November 2024, the FSA led the seventh animal welfare themed audit. Thirty six slaughterhouses were audited during the period, 25 producing red meat and 10 producing poultry meat, with one producing both. The audit found that slaughterhouse systems are broadly implemented in compliance with the legislation and provide a good level of assurance that the animal welfare legislative requirements are being fulfilled. The audit was categorised into the following themes (with recommendations):

Theme	Recommendation
CCTV (requirements, maintenance, and access)	Slaughterhouse operators to be reminded of their legal obligations under CCTV regulations, namely the installation and operation of the CCTV system, including the retention of images and information.
	Slaughterhouse operators to be reminded to put in place a service and maintenance plan for their CCTV system.
	Remind OV's about their enforcement obligations for breaches of CCTV legislation.
Operation and maintenance of back up stunning equipment	Slaughterhouse operators to be reminded to retain records of maintenance and calibration of back-up stunning equipment.
Lairage (including water and feed provision)	Slaughterhouse operators to be reminded that drinking water must be provided in line with the legislation.
Prioritising killing of animals unfit upon arrival	Slaughterhouse operators to ensure that their SOP details the process for prioritising the slaughter of females that have given birth during the journey, and the procedures relating to lactating dairy animals and unweaned animals.
Handling and restraint	Slaughterhouse operators to be reminded to ensure that the SOPs clearly set out the operation of restraining equipment in line with Article 14. Para 2 of the legislation.
Stun to stick time (duration from stunning to bleeding of animals)	Slaughterhouse operators to be reminded that their SOP should detail action to take where ineffective stunning has been identified, including back up stunning methods.
Monitoring of unconsciousness /death	Slaughterhouse operators to be reminded that their SOP should set out the frequency of their routine checks for signs of unconsciousness between stunning and death.

5.4 The FSA wrote to operational staff, slaughterhouse operators and industry representatives to advise them of the findings of the themed audit and to remind them of their responsibility to implement the recommendations. We will validate whether the recommendations are having the desired impact by reviewing inspection and enforcement data and conducting follow-up audits in 2025/2026, which will look at trends from the past three annual audits.

5.5 In partnership with DEFRA and Government Digital Service the FSA developed an on-line system for individuals to apply for a Certificate of Competence (CoC) to handle and slaughter animals in slaughterhouses. A CoC is awarded following a 3-month supervised training period and an assessment. The proposal received support from industry and the new system was introduced in March 2025. It replaced a paper-based system and enables FSA to process applications more accurately and quickly. There were 85 CoC applications processed through the new system during March 2025.

5.6 A single incident of covert filming within a West Midlands slaughterhouse by an animal welfare activist group required significant attention in February 2025, though the footage was believed to be from July and August 2024. The FSA had already taken proportionate enforcement action in relation to animal welfare breaches at the slaughterhouse, had increased attendance, and had investigated a case for referral to the Crown Prosecution Service prior to the footage being released. The covert filming attracted the attention of residents, local and national media, and the local Member of Parliament. The footage became linked to other complaints against the slaughterhouse outside of FSAs jurisdiction, such as excessive traffic and noise. Due to repeated breaches of animal welfare regulations, which the slaughterhouse operator failed to rectify, we revoked the slaughterhouse operators' approval to operate in May 2025. There were 42 records of breaches at this slaughterhouse in 2024/25 which equates to 8.3% of all slaughterhouse breaches investigated by the FSA within the period.

5.7 Since this covert filming incident an internal audit has assessed the FSA's process for reviewing the approval of slaughterhouse operators. The audit sampled seven premises over a year of operation. The outcomes of the audit were reported to the FSA's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in June 2025. The audit concluded with a Moderate Assurance outcome, confirming that the policy and process is robust with some minor recommendations for improvement.

5.8 Following the Board discussion in September 2024 and the subsequent covert filming incident referenced above, we conducted further analysis to examine the distribution of animal welfare breaches across slaughterhouses, and to evaluate whether appropriate actions were being taken in response to repeated breaches. This is set out in paragraphs 6.5 and 6.6.

5.9 There was reduced prosecution activity of animal welfare cases in 2024/25 with many cases paused by a judicial review. The judicial review has since concluded in FSA's favour (July 2025) so, subject to any appeal, prosecution cases should begin to progress again. In the cases that had progressed:

- a slaughterhouse operator was fined £6000 with two of its operatives fined £600 and £400 for excessive bovine stunning
- a slaughterman was fined £266 for poor handling of sheep
- a slaughterhouse operator was fined £46,800 (plus other costs of £16,000) for obstructing FSA officials from carrying out their statutory duties

5.10 In 2024/25 the FSA produced new guidance or enhanced existing guidance to improve operational delivery:

- referring farm and transport cases
- recording animal welfare cases
- CCTV in Wales regulations
- CoC code requirements for restraint at stunning
- poultry that are dead on arrival
- the approval process for bovine restraint
- signposting to guides to good practice
- back up method for religious slaughter of poultry
- movement of oversized / large horned animals to another slaughterhouse
- recording of CCTV on mobile phones
- applying for a CoC online

6. Data analysis

6.1 A biennial Slaughter Sector Survey was conducted by the FSA in February 2024 on behalf of DEFRA and Welsh Government and it was published by DEFRA in November 2024. The scope of the survey was the same as in 2022. [Farm animals: slaughter sector survey 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

6.2 The 2024 survey examined throughput, slaughter methods, and additional areas such as where the livestock was sourced from and where the meat was distributed to, including exports. For non-stun slaughter it found that for all species most animals were stunned prior to slaughter, however non-stun slaughter in red meat, mainly sheep, had increased.

- 97% of all poultry animals were stunned prior to slaughter (95% in 2022).
- 85% of all red meat animals were stunned prior to slaughter (89% in 2022).
- 98% of cattle were stunned prior to slaughter (99% in 2022).

- 71% of sheep were stunned prior to slaughter (77% in 2022).
- 89% of goats were stunned prior to slaughter (75% in 2022).
- 97% of meat chickens were stunned prior to slaughter (98% in 2022).
- 90% of pigs were stunned with high concentration CO2 with 10% being stunned through electronarcosis to the head (88% and 12% respectively in 2022). There is no legal provision for pigs to be killed by a non-stun method.

6.3 Animal Welfare Legislation permits non-stun slaughter and aims to respect religious freedoms. The Government encourages the highest standards of animal welfare at slaughter and would prefer all animals to be stunned before slaughter but respects the rights of Jews and Muslims to eat meat prepared in accordance with their religious beliefs, which includes the use of permitted methods of non-stun slaughter. The FSA has no legal basis to approve a slaughterhouse based on their slaughter method. Operators may select a method in line with customer demand provided it complies with legal and religious requirements. We ensure that all slaughter complies with the legal requirements. Our analysis found no clear evidence that animal welfare breaches are more or less likely to occur during non-stun slaughter compared to stunned slaughter. We continue to promote the use of the voluntary Demonstration of Life scheme. The independently developed scheme, which the FSA supports, provides assurance to Muslim consumers that stunning of sheep and goats is compatible with halal slaughter requirements. There is no mandatory requirement for meat to be labelled as stunned or non-stunned, but we will continue to liaise closely with DEFRA and Welsh Government on method of production labelling (see section 8) and any other work related to non-stun slaughter.

6.4 Following the September 2024 Board discussion, the animal welfare team carried out supplementary analysis on:

- Animal welfare breaches in small, medium and large slaughterhouses during 2023/24 (paragraph 6.5)
- Whether appropriate actions were being taken in response to repeat animal welfare breaches (paragraph 6.6)

6.5 Breaches found in small, medium, and large slaughterhouses – For each slaughterhouse size category the data looked at farm, transport, and slaughter breaches collectively: all breaches identified at the slaughterhouse. The data showed that large poultry sites performed better because they had fewer animal welfare breaches per million animals delivered/processed. Small/medium cattle sites performed poorest using the same measure. However, it is important to consider other animal welfare factors such as:

- red meat slaughter has greater variation in procedures and more manual handling for stunning, shackling, and bleeding whereas poultry slaughter is higher volume and more mechanised with less variation and fewer manual interventions.

- due to the complexity of the slaughter industry and supply chains, animals transported to larger slaughterhouses may experience longer transit times compared to those transported to smaller facilities. While this may not result in a breach of welfare standards, longer journeys are generally considered less favourable from an animal welfare perspective.

6.6 Repeat breaches – a repeat was defined as a slaughterhouse with more than one Level 4 (critical) animal welfare breach during the assessment period (July 2024 to June 2025). There were 51 slaughterhouses that met this criteria. FSA Operational management teams were consulted about their oversight of slaughterhouse performance and the appropriateness of enforcement actions. All responses were validated against recorded operational and enforcement data. The analysis concluded that in all cases appropriate enforcement and escalation action was taken to ensure a prompt return to compliance. The enforcement (including escalation) was:

Written Advice	Welfare Enforcement Notice (WEN)	Referral for Investigation (RFI) for potential prosecution	Certificate of Competence Warning Letter	Certificate of Competence Suspension	Certificate of Competence Revocation
38	6	8	13	21	8

6.7 The FSA chairs the Animal Welfare Referrals Working Group, working closely with DEFRA, APHA, and LA reps to improve the quality of farm and transport referrals and the supporting evidence that we provide, with the aim of improving follow up enforcement actions. While the number of referrals and affected animals has increased, we remain largely unaware of the follow up actions taken by other enforcement bodies. We have reviewed the Working Groups’ terms of reference and proposed that DEFRA, who set farm and transport animal welfare policies, assume the role of chair. We have also proposed that DEFRA establish a regular ‘case conference,’ requiring representatives of APHA and LAs to provide updates on the actions taken in response to breaches referred by the FSA.

7. Consumer and stakeholder interest in animal welfare

7.1 Latest insights from the FSA’s Food and You 2 survey reveal the extent to which consumers are concerned about animal welfare in the food production process. In line with recent years a third of respondents (33%) reported that they were ‘highly concerned’ and 42% were ‘somewhat concerned’.

7.2 There were nine Freedom of Information requests processed by the FSA animal welfare team during 2024/25. This figure represents 3.9% of the total received by the agency (232). The most common FOI themes were enquiries about slaughterhouse operations, FSA enforcement, and poultry breaches. We welcome the opportunity to respond and explain the information that we hold.

8. Policy activity and forward look

8.1 The FSA animal welfare team monitored a recent e-petition calling for the banning of non-stun slaughter in the UK, as some EU nations have done ([petition: ban non-stun slaughter in the UK](#), transcript at [debate: non-stun slaughter of animals](#)). Daniel Zeichner, the Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs confirmed that the Government will continue to allow the religious slaughter of animals for consumption by Muslims and Jews, including use of non-stun slaughter. Minister Zeichner also addressed product labelling and concerns that meat from

animals slaughtered without stunning may be sold to consumers who do not wish to consume meat killed in that way. A public consultation on proposals to improve and extend method-of-production labelling was conducted by the previous Government and the minister confirmed that DEFRA are looking closely at the consultation feedback. The consultation response has now been published - [summary of responses and government response - GOV.UK](#). It concludes:

- *“We will consider all views as we go forwards and will continue to work with relevant stakeholders including farming and food industry stakeholders, vets, scientists and NGOs as part of this continuing policy development... Recognising the strong support from the public and other stakeholders for clearer food information on welfare standards, we will consider the potential role of method of production labelling reform as part of the UK Government's development of an overarching approach to animal welfare and the wider food strategy. We will continue to work with the Devolved Governments on this.”*

8.2 DEFRA are due to communicate findings from its second Post Implementation Review of the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 in 2026. The FSA will continue to work closely with DEFRA and Welsh Government and with the slaughter industry to implement any required changes to animal welfare laws.

8.3 CO₂ is used in the slaughter of pigs and poultry, as well as food packaging. It is also used in the beverage industry, in agriculture, and in hospitals. Global production of CO₂ has a history of instability. Currently only a small percentage of CO₂ used in UK slaughterhouses is sourced from UK production as the majority is sourced from Europe, however, a change to UK supply could lead to pressure on import demands. The FSA continue to work closely with DEFRA, Welsh Government, and with the Department for Business and Trade on contingency planning for this.

8.4 The FSA animal welfare team will lead and deliver any improvement activities based on findings from our regular themed audits, our Welfare Assurance Team inspections, the Slaughter Sector Survey 2026, and we will always look to continuously improve our animal welfare inspection and enforcement activity and all associated operational guidance.

9. Conclusions

9.1 This paper provides an update on animal welfare activities in England and Wales. The Board is asked to acknowledge and comment on:

- Work and progress since the 2023/24 update to the Board.
- Ongoing work to improve animal welfare at slaughter, and the FSA's position on taking proportionate action against all animal welfare breaches in slaughterhouses
- Work to enhance and strengthen collaboration with other enforcement bodies responsible for farm and transport welfare
- The activities undertaken during and following an incident of covert filming footage which was provided to the FSA in February 2025