

Clean Beef Cattle for slaughter: Introduction

This guidance booklet is intended for all involved in the beef supply chain, such as farmers, hauliers, veterinary surgeons, and abattoir and market operators. It aims to provide advice on the production of clean cattle for slaughter.

Producing clean cattle for slaughter can be a difficult task, due to wet-weather, long months of winter housing and straw-bedding cost/ supply. However, if hides are contaminated with dung at the time of slaughter, there is a very real risk of the meat becoming contaminated with harmful bacteria, such as E.coli O157, Campylobacter and Salmonella.

Even the highest standards of abattoir hygiene cannot guarantee to prevent contamination of the carcass and cross-contamination of nearby carcasses during dressing. Research results have shown that the dirtier the hide, the greater the potential for carcass contamination and the higher the risk to human health. Wet hides may also increase the risk because bacteria may be transferred more readily.

On arrival at UK abattoirs, animals are assessed by the plant operator to determine whether they are clean enough to be slaughtered. The Food Standards Agency official* must verify that acceptable standards of cleanliness are used by the abattoir operator when sorting cattle so as not to compromise meat safety.

The operator may need to retain dirty animals in the lairage to be cleaned up, which can result in delay and extra costs for both producers and abattoir operators. It is both in the producers' and the abattoir operators' interest to make sure that cattle are clean when presented for slaughter. [Appendix 1](#) details the legislation that is relevant to clean livestock at slaughter and is correct at time of publication.

Food safety hazards

E. Coli O157 and other harmful bacteria such as salmonella and Campylobacter can live in the digestive tract of cattle without causing them ill health, and may be shed in their dung. The carriage of harmful bacteria by herds or flocks is unable to be visibly detected by farmers or their vets. E. Coli O157 is one particular type of E Coli, which has come to the forefront in recent years, because very small numbers can cause severe, even fatal, disease in humans.

*In Northern Ireland official supervision and enforcement in Approved Premises is carried out by [Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#) (DAERA) on behalf of the Food Standards Agency.