

Animal welfare

We maintain regular checks on slaughterhouses in the UK, to ensure that they comply with animal welfare regulations.

FSA's role in regulating animal welfare

We monitor and enforce animal welfare compliance in approved slaughterhouses on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England (Defra) and the Welsh Government in Wales through a Service Level Agreement. In Northern Ireland, this work is carried out by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Animal welfare requirements are monitored and enforced by Official Veterinarians to ensure that animals are spared avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations.

We instruct all staff to take prompt and proportionate enforcement action where animal welfare breaches are identified.

Responsibility for animal welfare

Slaughterhouse operators are responsible for food safety in slaughterhouses and ensuring the health and welfare of animals in their care.

This responsibility and requirements are set out in the guidance on the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing regulations ([Opens in a new window](#)).

Individuals who are involved in killing and related operations must be appropriately trained and licensed. They must hold a proficiency qualification before being able to apply for a Certificate of Competence.

A Certificate of Competence is required to slaughter animals in a slaughterhouse, which we issue on behalf of Defra and Welsh Government.

How to [apply for a Certificate of Competence](#).

[Food and Drink Qualification \(FDQ\)](#) approve learning providers to deliver and assess proficiency qualifications, as well as providing approved training for Certificates of Competence. They can provide further information for slaughterhouse staff to complete the required qualification.

FSA welfare checks

Official Veterinarians carry out checks to make sure that there have been no issues concerning the welfare of animals presented for slaughter.

This can happen:

- when the animals are on the farm
- during transport to the slaughterhouse
- when the animals arrive at the slaughterhouse
- Whilst held on site and up to the point of slaughter

Our operational staff check:

- the unloading and handling of animals
- where they are kept prior to slaughter
- the restraint and handling of animals
- the positioning of stunning equipment
- the effectiveness of the stun
- the efficiency of bleeding

Our checks include making sure that the slaughterhouse operator has appropriate procedures in place to safeguard animal welfare. Meat hygiene inspectors support them with these duties. This includes monitoring of slaughter by religious methods including special restraint facilities that may be in place for this purpose.

We work with Defra and Welsh Government to enforce animal welfare legislation in England and Wales. DAERA enforce animal welfare legislation in Northern Ireland.

Mandatory use of CCTV in slaughterhouses

Regulations on mandatory use of CCTV in slaughterhouses in England came into force in May 2018. A slaughterhouse operator must:

- install CCTV equipment in their slaughterhouse
- keep CCTV images for 90 days
- make the images available to our inspectors

CCTV equipment must provide a complete and clear view of killing and related operations in all areas of the slaughterhouse where there are live animals, such as areas where they are unloaded, kept, handled, stunned, and killed, up to the point where the assessment for absence of life is carried out.

Slaughterhouse operators must give access to their CCTV facilities and footage to our inspectors so they can provide effective monitoring and verify animal welfare standards. CCTV will be used as an additional tool; it does not replace direct practical official observations.

Our inspectors may issue an enforcement notice if slaughterhouse operators are in breach of the CCTV regulations.

The Welsh Government has a commitment to require CCTV in all approved slaughterhouses in Wales, in all areas where live animals are present. Following a [consultation on proposals](#), this requirement will be introduced in 2024.

New slaughterhouses

New slaughterhouses must meet all requirements of the regulations and will be assessed during their application for approval to operate.

Access to the CCTV equipment and footage

Slaughterhouses must give access to their CCTV facilities and footage to FSA inspectors so they can provide effective monitoring and verify animal welfare standards. CCTV will be used as an additional tool; it does not replace direct practical official observations.

There is no legal requirement for businesses or their representatives to be present when footage is reviewed. Business operators may decide to have a staff member present when footage is viewed or copied, or equipment seized.

Demonstration of Life

The Demonstration of Life (DoL) protocol is an industry-led, independent, government-supported Halal-assurance scheme that was agreed by an All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare in 2021.

It provides assurance for domestic and international Muslim consumers that electrical head-only stunning of sheep and goats is compatible with halal slaughter requirements.

It involves an arranged assessment of stunning (of one or two animals), overseen by an FSA Vet (currently at no cost) and with an approved religious body present, who will certify that the stun method is halal compliant. Certification lasts for one year and can be renewed annually.

Slaughterhouse operators can [apply to join the DoL scheme](#), where they will find a section on Demonstration of Life and familiarise themselves with the prerequisites and find a link to the application form.

Animal Welfare Data - our checks

For England and Wales we publish Open Data sets relating to animal welfare enforcement action and animal welfare compliance as a proportion of throughput. There are three data sets:

- [Animal Welfare non-compliance \(on farm, transport and slaughterhouse\)](#)
- [Animal Welfare compliance slaughterhouse \(critical non-compliances against throughput\)](#)
- [Animal Welfare compliance on farm and transport \(critical non-compliances against throughput\)](#)

The non-compliance data set shows the number of incidents which attracted enforcement in England and Wales in each area of the slaughterhouse, and the number and nature of the non-compliances which were assessed to have occurred either on the farm or during transport and have been shared with the competent authority.

The compliance data sets compare the number of animals, by species, that have experienced suffering or distress as recorded in the non-compliance data; against the total either arriving in compliance (on farm and transport) or processed in compliance (slaughterhouse) with relevant animal welfare legislation.

There is supporting documentation published alongside the Open Data which covers the background to the data, understanding the hierarchy of enforcement, and how the scoring is allocated.

National Survey

We have carried out several surveys on behalf of Defra and the Welsh Government.

Week-long animal welfare surveys were carried out in slaughterhouses in 2011, 2013, 2015, 2018 and 2022 to provide assurance that:

- slaughterhouse operators were taking active steps to comply with legal requirements and achieve necessary animal welfare standards
- Official Veterinarians and front-line teams were carrying out their roles effectively, with appropriate monitoring and relevant enforcement action being taken in the event of slaughterhouse operator non-compliance

Results of animal welfare surveys carried out in 2011, 2013 and 2015 are available in the [National Archives](#) and [Farm animals: data from survey of slaughter methods 2015](#)

The results of [2018 animal welfare survey](#) and the [2022 animal welfare survey](#) were published by Defra.