

FSA and FSS call for immediate action to address vet workforce challenges

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) are asking wider government and the veterinary profession to work together to develop a sustainable approach to UK's veterinary capacity and capability.

This follows the [joint Annual Report Our Food 2022: An annual review of food standards across the UK](#) which called on the government and professional bodies to work together to significantly improve recruitment and retention of Official Veterinarians (OVs).

After Emily Miles addressed the EFRA committee both Chief Executives commented:

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Our Official Veterinarians are the backbone in protecting animal health and welfare and trade as well as assuring food safety standards in the UK.

The FSA's ability to deliver OV-led inspections in abattoirs is under sustained pressure because of vet workforce shortages, putting at risk the high consumer trust we have in meat and animal welfare standards here. We rely on vets from overseas to do critical public health and animal welfare work in abattoirs, with very few UK-trained vets currently interested in doing this work.

That is why today the FSA asked for legislative reform, financial backing, a supportive immigration policy and a systematic strategy to deliver rewarding and sustainable veterinary careers. We need a joined-up approach across government and the veterinary profession so that we end the current precarious situation and the UK public can have food they can trust into the future."

Emily Miles, Food Standards Agency Chief Executive

The entire veterinary profession across the UK is facing resourcing challenges, which are contributing to difficulties and delays in recruiting sufficient OVs.

Our OVs play a key role in securing high standards of animal welfare and ensuring meat produced by abattoirs or processing plants is handled safely and is in line with relevant food law.

Not having sufficient OV resource has the potential to cripple export capability, consumers would lose trust in the UK system and the critical functions on animal health and welfare surveillance would be undermined.

To put into context just how much we rely on overseas nationals for this important role, out of around 30 OV's employed by FSS, there is only one part-time UK national official within the team. As a result, supporting the meat industry and ensuring consumer protection means overseas recruitment remains vital in securing adequate staffing.

Vet supply is a challenge and quite frankly the harder we make it to recruit this highly skilled profession the greater the chance they go elsewhere, to the UK's economic detriment.

We are calling for the UK Government to ensure that when it comes to veterinary supply, and in particular being able to attract vets, they acknowledge the challenges and will make sensible provision for veterinary recruitment, including on immigration policy.

Geoff Ogle, Food Standards Scotland Chief Executive

FSS and FSA Official Veterinarians and Meat Hygiene Inspectors work as a team to inspect every animal and carcass in the abattoirs, playing an essential function in livestock farming and protecting public health.