

Annual Animal Welfare Report 2025/26

FSA 26/06/08 - Report by FSA Animal Welfare Team

1. Summary

1.1 This paper updates the Board on the FSA's delivery of animal welfare controls in slaughterhouses in England and Wales during 2025/26, and on related activity across farms and transport. The paper also previews potential future activity.

1.2 This year saw a rise of 6% in the number of detected breaches of animal welfare law in slaughterhouses, although the total number of animals identified as affected by those breaches has reduced slightly, whilst throughput (the number of animals processed) has remained stable. Similarly, there was a rise in the number of detected on-farm and transport breaches (+7%), however there was a significant fall (-44%) in the number of animals affected by those breaches.

1.3 The FSA has continued to act on every identified breach of animal welfare law. This paper reports on trends, actions taken, successful prosecutions and public interest in animal welfare.

1.4 The Board is invited to acknowledge and comment on progress since the 2024/25 annual report, ongoing work to improve animal welfare and the position on proportionate enforcement in slaughterhouses.

1.5 The Board is asked to note the increasing public, media and Parliamentary interest in non-stun slaughter over the course of this year, and to agree that the FSA should continue to collaborate with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government, as animal welfare and religious slaughter policy owners, to support efforts to reduce levels of non-stun slaughter.

2. Introduction

2.1 This paper provides the annual report to the Board on the FSA's animal welfare delivery on behalf of Defra and the 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 – Compliance data in slaughterhouses, on-farm, and in transport
- Section 5 – Progress of in year activities

- Section 6 – Consumer and stakeholder interest in animal welfare
- Section 7 – Policy activity and forward look
- Section 8 – Conclusions

3. Background and context

3.1 Defra and the Welsh Government hold policy responsibility for animal welfare laws in England and Wales, covering farms, transport and slaughterhouses.

3.2 Slaughterhouse operators are responsible for complying with all animal welfare laws, policies and associated requirements within their facilities.

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

3.4 The FSA acts on all identified breaches of animal welfare law in slaughterhouses. A tiered enforcement approach is applied, ranging from informal action for minor breaches to formal measures for serious or repeated breaches. These may include written notices, suspension or revocation of slaughter licences, criminal investigation and referral for prosecution, and removal of approval to operate as a slaughterhouse.

3.5 Animal welfare laws on-farm and during transport are regulated by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and enforced by Local Authorities (LAs). Potential breaches identified by OVs in slaughterhouses are referred to them for investigation and enforcement.

3.6 A breach of animal welfare law may affect one animal (such as an ineffective stun) or multiple animals (such as a failure to provide water in a pen) and may also relate to a technical issue that does not impact animals (such as a temporary CCTV system failure).

4. Summary of animal welfare compliance data in slaughterhouses, on-farm and in transport

4.1 Comparison of animal welfare law breaches – 2024/25 vs 2025/26:

	2024/25	2025/26	% Change from 2024/25
Animals slaughtered	1.035 bn	1.036 bn	0.1%
Slaughterhouse			
Number of breaches	509	542	6%
Level 3 breaches (potential risk)	251 (49% of total)	263 (49% of total)	5%

Level 4 breaches (imminent risk / impact)	258 (51% of total)	279 (51% of total)	8%
Animals affected	33,920	33,679	-0.7%
On-Farm & Transport (cases referred to APHA and Local Authorities)			
Number of breaches	4,464	4,769	7%
Level 3 breaches (potential risk)	60 (1% of total)	76 (2% of total)	27%
Level 4 breaches (imminent risk / impact)	4,404 (99% of total)	4,693 (98% of total)	7%
Animals affected	1,073,102	596,445	-44%

4.2 Overall compliance with animal welfare law remains high across the sector. Over 1bn animals are processed annually in slaughterhouses. Of these, around 0.0032% (33,679 animals) were detected as being affected by breaches of animal welfare law at slaughter. A slightly higher proportion, 0.058% (596,445 animals) were detected as being affected by breaches of animal welfare law before arrival, i.e. occurring on-farm or during transport.

4.3 When compared with 2024/25, the number of affected animals at slaughter remains stable (from 33,920 animals to 33,679). The number of affected animals on-farm or during transport has reduced by 44% (from 1,073,102 animals to 596,445). This is mainly due to fewer cases of Pododermatitis in poultry (from 177 cases in 2024/25 to 73 cases in 2025/26). Pododermatitis can affect whole flocks of birds, so a reduction in cases can significantly reduce the number of affected on-farm animals.

4.4 There were 542 breaches of animal welfare law at slaughter, which is a 6% increase from 2024/25. The increase is concentrated in cattle (lairage) breaches which rose by 25, and in poultry (management and stunning) breaches which rose by 34 and 40 respectively. CCTV system failures increased from 35 to 47, which is the second year of increase, suggesting systems are becoming more prone to failure. Slaughterhouse Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) breaches fell from 31 to 22 however this continues to be an area requiring further improvement.

4.5 There were 4,769 on-farm and transport law breaches referred to APHA and LAs, which is a 7% increase from 2024/25. The increase is concentrated in poultry trappings (+6%) resulting from improved FSA guidance for OV's on identification and reporting, and an increase in dead-on-arrival breaches (+16%), mainly in poultry.

4.6 Verbal advice is given in response to all breaches of animal welfare law at slaughter. In addition, in 2025/26, the FSA issued 159 written advice and warning letters, 19 enforcement notices, and referred 14 cases to FSA investigators for potential prosecution. During the same period, 37 slaughterers' Certificates of Competence were suspended and 8 were revoked.

5. Progress of in year activities

5.1 The Animal Welfare Action Plan is managed by the FSA, and delivery is overseen by the Animal Welfare Steering Group, comprising representatives from FSA, Defra, the Welsh Government, APHA, DAERA, and Food Standards Scotland. This section highlights work

delivered under the Action Plan, which seeks to strengthen animal welfare through:

- Verification and compliance – Annual Themed Audits, Welfare Assurance Team slaughterhouse verification checks, compliance and referral reporting to Defra and the Welsh Government
- Accountability and collaboration – Annual refinement of the Animal Welfare Service Level Agreement with Defra and the Welsh Government, partnership working with industry and across Government, Referrals Working Group, CO2 monitoring, Jhatka slaughter discussions
- Education and guidance – Ongoing refinement of technical guidance, partnership working with industry and across Government, Animal Welfare blog
- Data, analysis and reporting – Open animal welfare law breach and compliance data, Biennial Slaughter Sector Surveys, enhancing IT systems

5.2 Between 1 May and 30 June 2025, we conducted our 2025/26 themed Audit, undertaken by FSA Veterinary Auditors, at a sample of slaughterhouses in England and Wales alongside routine scheduled audits. 38 slaughterhouses were captured by the themed Audits during the period (31 red meat and 7 poultry). The findings indicated that slaughterhouse systems are largely compliant and provide a good level of assurance against legislative requirements in England and Wales.

5.3 Across 104 themed audits at 90 slaughterhouses between 2023 and 2025, strong compliance was found in access to CCTV, backup stunning equipment, and the presence of core SOPs. However, weaknesses included limited CCTV data retention and insufficient details in SOPs for prioritising vulnerable animals, particularly unweaned animals, lactating dairy animals, and females giving birth in transport. No breaches of animal welfare law causing animal harm were identified. Findings were shared with operators, Official Veterinarians, and industry groups, with recommendations implemented through guidance and instruction updates. Ongoing monitoring shows improved compliance in most areas, shaping the 2026/27 audit themes.

5.4 The FSA Welfare Assurance Team (WAT) are a dedicated team of Meat Hygiene Inspectors that have additional animal welfare verification training and conduct annual slaughterhouse assurance visits. In 2025/26, they conducted 234 visits. Areas found to be most frequently requiring improvement were lairage conditions, access to water, and the quality of SOPs. The WAT team report their findings to the slaughterhouse operator and the OV following each visit, with enforcement action taken by the OV where warranted.

5.5 During the September 2025 Board meeting, members expressed a desire to differentiate between cases of accidental and wilful harm for Level 4 breaches of animal welfare at slaughter law. Following the meeting, the FSA animal welfare team have since amended and tested the enforcement IT system and associated guidance. The changes were introduced in May 2026. Our next annual report will include enhanced analysis showing proportions of wilful and other harm. The change also incorporated amendments to support more effective triaging of on-farm and transport referrals.

5.6 The FSA chaired the quarterly Animal Welfare Referrals Working Group for on-farm and transport animal welfare issues, working closely with APHA, LAs, Defra and the Welsh Government to improve the quality of FSA referrals, and to support effective APHA and LA operational delivery and enforcement. Chairing responsibility will transfer to Defra in 2026,

reflecting their policy responsibility in this area. The FSA will, however, continue to play a key role in supporting ongoing improvements to on-farm and transport animal welfare.

5.7 Since September 2025, following the closure of a UK plant producing carbon dioxide (CO₂), the FSA Animal Welfare and Field Operations teams have monitored stock levels of CO₂ stored by pig and poultry slaughterhouses for pre-slaughter stunning. Monitoring continued when supply concerns rose in February 2026 due to the Middle East conflict. Data gathered through this monitoring indicates that adequate stocks have been consistently maintained since monitoring began, providing a degree of confidence in the supply chain. In March 2026, UK Government has supported the restart of operations at a UK based CO₂ manufacturing site for a temporary period to strengthen domestic supply resilience. Defra's supply chain resilience team have confirmed that, in the event of supply constraints, the slaughter sector would be prioritised on animal welfare grounds.

5.8 In November 2025, the FSA were approached via Defra by representatives of the Sikh community to engage in discussions on the potential provision of Sikh religious slaughter (known as Jhatka slaughter) in England. The proposed method involves pre-stunning of the animal followed by removal of the head. The UK Sikh community do not have access to Jhatka slaughtered meat, and the Jhatka Council are therefore exploring the possibilities. Engagement is at an early stage, and the Jhatka Council will engage with slaughterhouse operators and explore commercial interest.

5.9 During 2025/26, the FSA produced new and updated guidance covering CCTV in England and Wales, enforcement decision making and evidence handling, animal handling and slaughter practices, liaison with LAs and APHA, and Certificates of Competence.

5.10 A biennial Slaughter Sector Survey was conducted by the FSA in February 2026 on behalf of Defra and the Welsh Government. The survey examined throughput and methods (levels of stunned and non-stunned slaughter) alongside additional information such as the source of livestock and the distribution of meat, including exports. Data collection covered slaughter production from 9 to 15 February 2026. The survey data was submitted to Defra and the Welsh Government at the end of February 2026. They will publish the findings, including comparative analysis against the 2024 survey, in the summer of 2026.

5.11 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for animal welfare offences were introduced in England from January 2024. This provided the FSA and other enforcement agencies with a discretionary power to issue FPNs for certain animal welfare offences. Following initial engagement with Defra, it was agreed FPNs were unlikely to be proportionate for most animal welfare offences investigated by the FSA (and subsequently prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service). An application for permission to bring a Judicial Review (JR) in relation to the FSA's position on FPNs was made in October 2025. In April 2026, the FSA chose to adopt FPNs in England, where proportionate. A working group has since developed proposals to amend the FSA animal welfare enforcement policy to include an option to use FPNs. The JR application is awaiting a decision on permission.

5.12 Animal welfare at slaughter prosecutions in 2025/26 resulted in a prison sentence, community orders of 400 hours unpaid work, a 10-day rehabilitation activity requirement, and fines, as follows:

- Three operatives at a poultry slaughterhouse were convicted of offences linked to the mishandling of poultry during their unloading and transfer to the lairage. One operative received a suspended 6-week prison sentence and a Community Order for 100 hours of unpaid work plus a 10-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement. The second also received a Community Order for 100 hours of unpaid work, whilst the third was fined £1,000.

- A conviction was secured under the Mandatory Closed-Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018. The partners in a red meat slaughterhouse each pleaded guilty to two offences after failing to ensure that footage from the plant CCTV system for the previous 90 days was retained and stored. Each partner was fined £800.
- An operative at a red meat slaughterhouse pleaded guilty to eleven offences concerning the treatment of sheep whilst performing stunning and shackling. The operative received a Community Order for 200 hours of unpaid work.

5.13 There were two incidents of covert filming during the reporting period. The first took place in December 2025. The incident and all footage were fully investigated by FSA Officials, and no animal welfare law breaches were identified within the slaughterhouse. APHA and the LA were responsible for investigating and enforcing any alleged animal welfare law breaches occurring elsewhere. The second incident was reported to the FSA in April 2026 and related to covert slaughterhouse footage taken in February 2026 of Kosher cattle slaughter. The FSA immediately initiated a full investigation, with which the business has been fully cooperative. Enforcement action has been taken, including the removal and suspension of individuals from working with animals, and the investigation is ongoing. The FSA animal welfare team has handled several hundred pieces of correspondences relating to the footage and non-stun slaughter policy in general.

6. Consumer and stakeholder interest in animal welfare

6.1 Findings from the [Consumer Insights Tracker](#) show high levels of reported concern about animal welfare in the food industry. In December 2025, 74% of survey respondents said they were concerned about this, when prompted. animal welfare ranked 5th of the highest concerns, below other top issues such as food prices, ultra processed foods, and food waste in the food chain. Despite this level of concern, evidence from [Food and You 2](#) indicates the proportion of consumers who say they check animal welfare information when buying food has gradually fallen over time from 44% in July-October 2020 when tracking began to 31% in May-August 2025 (latest available data), suggesting the animal welfare concern may not be consistently reflected in purchasing behaviour. The absence of clear and consistent animal welfare or method of slaughter labelling may also be a contributory factor.

6.2 In 2025/26 the FSA animal welfare team responded to 37 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, which represents 14% of the total received by the agency. This is a significant increase from the 9 FOIs (3.9% of the agency FOIs) in 2024/25. The FOIs mostly related to Halal (Muslim) slaughter (stunned and non-stunned), Shechita (Jewish) slaughter (non-stunned), animal welfare law breaches, poultry conditions, and animals arriving dead at slaughterhouses. The growing profile of religious and non-stun slaughter across social media is also a potential cause of this increase.

6.3 The FSA saw increasing public, media, and parliamentary interest in animal welfare throughout 2025/26, resulting from high-profile social media campaigns relating to non-stun slaughter, and Defra's publication of the *Animal Welfare Strategy for England* in December 2025. The FSA Animal Welfare and Communications teams collaborated to produce a clear, accessible, evidence-based blog addressing animal welfare at slaughter, including the use of stun and non-stun methods. The blog will address concerns and misunderstanding while explaining the legal framework, the safeguards in place, and the FSA's role in enforcing animal welfare standards. The blog will be published in June 2026.

6.4 As policy leads, Defra and the Welsh Government advocate the highest standards of animal welfare and a preference for pre-slaughter stunning, while respecting the rights of Jews and Muslims to eat meat prepared in accordance with their religious beliefs. The FSA will continue to collaborate with them to support efforts to reduce levels of non-stun slaughter.

7. Policy activity and forward look

7.1 Defra published the *Animal Welfare Strategy for England* in December 2025. The Strategy sets out a long-term programme to deliver a step-change in animal welfare by 2030, covering farmed animals, companion animals and wild animals. The strategy includes commitments affecting slaughter practices, such as consulting on ending the use of CO2 to stun pigs, as well as commitments to improve on-farm and transport welfare through partnership working, evidence-based policy development, and targeted regulatory intervention. Delivery will require close collaboration between Defra, FSA and the meat industry to ensure that any welfare changes are achieved without compromise. Further information about the Defra delivery timetable is expected in 2026/27, and the FSA will work closely with Defra and with the slaughter industry on any required changes.

7.2 In May and June 2026, the FSA will carry out an Animal Welfare Themed Audit across slaughterhouses in England and Wales, alongside routine Official Controls audits. At least 10% of slaughterhouses will be audited, covering red and white meat establishments. The audit will assess the effectiveness of slaughterhouse operator animal welfare systems, and the effectiveness of FSA controls. The audit will assess key welfare risk areas identified through previous audit outcomes, animal welfare law breaches, and WAT visit outcomes. Findings and recommendations will be reported to Defra, the Welsh Government and industry representatives in the summer of 2026.

8. Conclusions

8.1 This paper provides an update on animal welfare activities in England and Wales and previews potential future activity. The Board is invited to:

- acknowledge and comment on progress since the 2024/25 update to the Board, ongoing work to improve animal welfare, the position on proportionate enforcement in slaughterhouses, and collaboration with partner enforcement bodies for on-farm and transport animal welfare.
- note increasing public, media and Parliamentary interest in non-stun slaughter over the course of this year, and to agree that the FSA should continue to collaborate with Defra and the Welsh Government, as animal welfare and religious slaughter policy owners, to support efforts to reduce levels of non-stun slaughter.

Annex

PDF

[View FSA 26-06-08 - Analysis of Trends for Major and Critical Animal Welfare Law Breaches in England and Wales. as PDF\(Open in a new window\) \(538.73 KB\)](#)