

Trialling a modernised poultry inspection system in UK slaughterhouses

Area of research interest: [Innovative regulator](#)

Study duration: 2016-01-01

Project code: FS101141

Conducted by: IPSOS Mori

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Background

Our organisations 2015-2020 strategy states that *Campylobacter* poses an unacceptable level of risk for consumers. We plan to use the results of the trial to inform discussions on the future direction of changes in poultry official controls. Accordingly, we wished trial a modernised poultry inspection system running in tandem with current EU regulatory obligations. The Verification Authorised Officer (VAO) – i.e. the resident Official Veterinarian (OV) in each respective trial slaughterhouse – was able to refocus traditional official controls to new verification tasks that verify FBO interventions and inform our interventions to better control microbial hazards such as *Campylobacter*. Main principles of the trial were as follows:

- improve controls on campylobacter and other microbiological hazards
- increase food business operator (FBO) responsibility / accountability
- concentrate official tasks on the verification of FBO's compliance with the EU legislation and its enforcement.
- maintain consumer confidence (food safety, animal health and welfare)

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Research Approach

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by us in July 2015 to undertake a mixed method study. The key aims were to ascertain how well these activities worked in practice and if they could contribute to a reduction in levels of contamination and fewer birds infected with a high level of *Campylobacter*, thus improving the likelihood that poultry meat produced is safer for human consumption.

The key aim of this study was to assess the new modernised poultry system being trialled in a selection of poultry slaughterhouses across the UK. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to:

- examine understanding and views of those directly affected by the modernised poultry inspection system, including FBOs and other SH staff, VAOs, PIAs, and Poultry Meat Inspectors (PMIs);
- establish how the system was implemented in practice, and identify issues raised during the trial period and if and how corrective action was taken;
- explore the predicted and reported impacts of a modernised poultry inspection system;

- provide recommendations which may help further reduce the prevalence and levels of *Campylobacter* in poultry;
- understand the trial effect on contamination, pathology and *Campylobacter* by running a number of statistical tests of contamination and pathology data and microbial sampling.

A mixed method approach was employed which consisted of:

Longitudinal case study visits

These visits offered insight into how a modernised inspection system worked in practice, and helped researchers to understand views and expectations of the trial, and its reported impact.

Analysis of microbial testing

This was conducted for each trial SH helped the us to understand the effect of the trial on levels of contamination, pathology and *Campylobacter*.

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Results

Views of the trial

Support was shown among VAOs for the new modernised poultry inspection system, despite some comments in relation to the trial being a pre cursor to withdrawing their permanent presence from poultry SHs in the UK.

Most FBO and SH managers felt the re-focussed verification checks would allow the VAO to “act as a second pair of eyes”, and bring to their attention issues to help them better prepare for external audit / inspection.

PIAs generally did not express a strong opinion either way about the new modernised poultry inspection system, though PMIs were positive. They believed the new system might encourage poultry SHs to assign the same level of significance to food safety as they assume they do to food quality.

Perceived Impacts of the trial

There were conflicting views of the reported impact on food safety. Some – even those who said they were confident in their ability to control risk within the SH environment – suggested the trial may have had a positive effect on food safety.

Although they were confident their product had always been safe, they suggested the intervention of the VAO led to more instances of contamination being identified, as compared to the traditional system. In contrast, some FBOs suggested that because the in-take and SH dressing processes had remained the same then it was unlikely that the trial had made any difference.

Analysis of quantitative data

Analysis of contamination and pathology data suggests the VAO verification checks led to a higher number of detections of contamination and pathology, which indicates that the VAO verification checks help to better identify the risks that occur in slaughtering and dressing. However, the results of the statistical tests need to be interpreted with caution due to the absence of an intervention control, meaning we cannot be certain of causality.

Research report

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

PDF

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