

## Questions for Board – September 2018

David Grimsell (six questions)

David Grimsell submitted six questions, some of which fall outside the FSA's responsibilities. Those questions that are relevant to the FSA are:

1. How is it that the supposed FSA controls have been so ineffective in detecting and recording welfare breaches? What is the FSA going to do to actually collect and publish meaningful information?

The FSA takes animal welfare at abattoirs very seriously and has promptly investigated every matter that Animal Aid has brought to our attention. Where deficiencies were found, appropriate enforcement action was taken including criminal prosecutions. Sites targeted for undercover surveillance are likely to be chosen on an intelligence led basis and are not representative of operational practices across the 274 abattoirs in England and Wales.

2. What is happening to end the use of high concentration Carbon Dioxide to slaughter pigs?

The use of carbon dioxide in high concentration for the commercial stunning of pigs is permitted under Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at time of killing. Whilst the UK remains a full member of the EU and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force, the Government will continue to implement and apply EU legislation. We are therefore unable to unilaterally ban gas stunning using high concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub>, whilst we remain a member of the European Union.

The Government is aware of concerns over the use of high concentration carbon dioxide gas in the slaughtering of pigs and agrees that there is a need for the development of stunning methods which avoid its use.

The Government are jointly funding with the Humane Slaughter Association a research project in this area to find a commercially viable alternative.

3. What progress is being made on the use of low atmospheric pressure stunning for different species (for example, poultry and pigs)?

In terms of poultry, low atmospheric pressure stunning (LAPS) is now a permitted method under Annex I of Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005 for broilers under 4kg of weight.

For Pigs, the Government is committed to improving animal welfare and, due to our concerns over the use of carbon dioxide in high concentrations, we are jointly funding with the Humane Slaughter Association a research project in this area. Researchers at the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh are carrying out a two-year research project to determine whether Low Atmospheric Pressure Stunning might be a more humane way to stun pigs during commercial slaughter.

The use of carbon dioxide in high concentration for the commercial stunning of pigs is still permitted under Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at time of killing.

Tor Bailey - Campaign Manager Farming & Slaughter, Animal Aid (four questions)

1. Would the Board welcome the introduction of mandatory CCTV in Wales?

The Board would welcome the introduction of mandatory CCTV in Wales. The Welsh Government has provided assistance to small and medium slaughterhouses in Wales which could be used to improve slaughterhouse infrastructure including installation of CCTV. In the meantime Welsh Government continues to explore the opportunities to legislate, in the longer term.

2. What steps are FSA (Wales) taking in order to better safeguard animal welfare at point of slaughter, in the absence of mandatory CCTV? How do OV's monitor welfare at point of slaughter in inaccessible areas, for example?

Around 99% of animals slaughtered in Wales are killed in premises with some form of CCTV. Please see response to question one above re: funding assistance to install CCTV.

3. Roughly how many unannounced inspections have taken place at Welsh slaughterhouses so far this current year? How does this compare to the last year?

Unannounced inspections do not take place in slaughterhouses as we have a permanent presence in these premises. However, we do make unannounced visits by the Welfare Assurance Team and all slaughterhouses in Wales have been visited.

4. What extra measures are the FSA taking for slaughterhouses who consistently fail audits? Would the FSA consider imposing far greater penalties for slaughterhouses that fail on the same counts on a number of occasions?

When an establishment receives an unsatisfactory audit outcome the FSA will follow up any outstanding major non-compliances with further follow up audits and inspections until they are resolved. If the FSA is concerned at the lack of progress the FBO is making to resolve these non-compliances a formal review of approval will be conducted. Where evidence of serious deficiencies are found, the FBO will be provided an opportunity to provide guarantees over future production. If the guarantees are not considered adequate the approval will be withdrawn.

The FSA has withdrawn the approval from six establishments since the start of 2017.

Paul Anderson - Managing Director, UV Safe Limited (six questions)

1. Legislation introduced in 2005 (Regulation (EC) 853/2004) permits the use of alternative techniques for disinfecting tools aside from hot water at 82°C, provided they have equivalent effect.

The cited option is correct. Section 3, in Chapter II, Requirements for slaughterhouses, Annex III, Specific Requirements of (Regulation (EC) 853/2004) indicates: 'They ("slaughterhouses") must have facilities for disinfecting tools with hot water supplied at not less than 82 °C, or an alternative system having an equivalent effect.'

Article 2, Chapter 1 of Regulation (EC) 852/2004 defines the term equivalent as, 'capable of meeting the same objectives'.

2. Could the Agency explain why, given that this flexibility (which can hold significant environmental benefits whilst retaining the food safety requirements) has been in law since 2005, a consultation on a process of approval was only launched in late in 2017?

Alternative systems for the disinfection of tools in cutting plants have been in use since the introduction of Regulation 853/2004. Its use in abattoirs has not been proposed to the Agency until very recently, by the end of 2016. Since then, there has been an increasing interest and demand for the use of alternative sanitation methods in abattoirs.

Subsequently, in 2017 the FSA decided to bring together the existing advice and guidance for cutting plants and the newly developed guidance for abattoirs into consolidated format, with instructions for FBOs in the application and validation processes and direction for enforcement officers. It was this consolidated version of existing guidance what was consulted on.

3. Follow up: In that interim period, several other methods and systems were acknowledged by the Agency (either based on science provided, or a simple trial) as being equivalent, yet did not need to go through the gold plated approval system now in place, and the use of UV technology seems to be the only method under this level of scrutiny?

This is inaccurate. The FSA, as an independent Government Organisation cannot and does not endorse or approve any specific brand or commercial product.

Some establishments have taken the opportunity to use alternative sanitation methods, such as chemical disinfection, and in all cases Food Business Operators have had to show evidence to the satisfaction of the FSA that its

use and the process in which it is used, are at least equivalent to water at 82°C. The requirements used in these assessments now form part of the consolidated guidance.

4. Follow up: Whilst the Agency, in its consultation, tried to justify plant-by-plant trials, is it not the technology that is being assessed as equivalent; and working instructions, changes to FSMS and other peripheral matters should be covered in day to day enforcement duties?

Under the hygiene regulations, the FSA is responsible for approving and authorising certain procedures in abattoirs and cutting plants in England and Wales.

Abattoir authorisations are issued based on the overall process control at the establishment, not on the specific product used to reach the required sanitation levels, which can be achieved by different means, equipment or commercial brands.

The decision to individually approve the use of alternative means in abattoirs, whilst in cutting plants there is no such a similar requirement, is because dressing operations carried out in abattoirs are considered riskier than those in cutting plants.

In addition, the conditions and individual work arrangements vary and differ between places i.e. no two abattoirs are the same, and procedures, staff, management, culture, etc are different from one to another. Because of all those variations and differences, the authorisation for slaughterhouses is at present secured on a case by case basis. This might be reviewed in the near future as the procedures standardise.

The requirement to make simple adjustments on the Food Business Operator standard operating procedures or their HACCP system is standard practice when a process or procedure changes at any food establishment. The FSA also needs to be content the FBO has measures in place to regularly verify the process is still maintaining an equivalent effect and has adequate procedures to follow when results deviate from required standards. This is also covered in article 5 of Regulation (EC) 852/2004.

5. Under the same EU Regulations it is permissible to use the so called 'steam vacuum' to remove visible contamination from a carcass, Paragraph 10, Chapter IV, Section 1, Annex III states that 'any visible contamination must be removed without delay by trimming or alternative means having an equivalent effect'

The Regulations permit alternative means to trimming for the removal of visible contamination. "Steam vacuum" is one of them, but not the only one.

6. Follow up: The use of the steam vacuum equipment which may be used to remove visual carcass contamination in place of trimming by knives was validated by the Danish Meat Research Institute taking 450 samples from

cattle carcasses over six days on a single species kill line, this now has blanket EU approval and is also widely used outside of the EU, why therefore do the FSA insist on a site by site validation for alternative knife sterilisers where 8 FBO's covering four species have now submitted almost 2000 samples for the same authorisation and then have to wait up to four months for the go ahead.

The use of steam vacuum is permitted in very specific circumstances to remove visible contamination, dirt and hair from relatively smooth carcass surfaces when the contamination incidents occur accidentally.

The verification of the effectiveness for this device, has its principles on visual examination as a specific task included in the inspection protocol, firstly by the operative handling the equipment, and secondly by the FSA inspectors carrying out official duties at the abattoir. Worth noting that carcasses with visible contamination cannot be released for human consumption.

For these reasons, the FSA considered that the use of this equipment did not require such a robust case by case microbiological validation process.

Unlike the situation above, the use of UV sterilisers requires a more robust validation process due to the impossibility to confirm visually its effectiveness and equivalence to the standard method applying 82°C water (see the reply to question four).

The guidance developed by the FSA sets out a pragmatic and effective method to help FBOs meet the requirements for equivalence. This methodology has been used and successfully applied by many FBOs that are now using equivalent methods in their slaughterhouses and cutting plants.