

P 04-433 CCTV in Slaughterhouses, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 17.09.19

Animal Aid's Petition Committee submission in light of Farmers Fresh investigation

I note that at the Petitions Committee meeting last November, the Committee agreed to put forward a report to the Cabinet Secretary concerning CCTV in Welsh slaughterhouses, and I understand that this is to happen imminently. I would be very grateful if the following information could please be included in the report.

Animal Aid has conducted an extensive investigation into Farmers Fresh slaughterhouse in Wrexham and brought to light damning new evidence which makes the case for mandatory CCTV for Welsh slaughterhouses. We would be very grateful if you could put forward this vital new evidence for consideration and inclusion.

Here is a weblink to the investigation: <https://www.animalaid.org.uk/breaking-our-covert-cameras-capture-appalling-scenes-of-slaughterhouse-incompetence-and-chaos-at-farmers-fresh-wales/>

And here is the link to the exclusive article from the Daily Mail:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7416503/Hidden-camera-footage-shows-abattoir-workers-throwing-sheep-backs-slaughterhouse.html>

Our investigators took four sets of footage at Farmers Fresh slaughterhouse in Wrexham, between 26th March and 3rd June 2019.

We were horrified to bring to light a number of incidents. These are set out below.

The high throughput of animals may well have exacerbated issues such as poor layout and design of animal loading facilities. The need for fast-paced movement, stunning and killing could contribute to worker fatigue, which could well lead to greater levels of frustration being misdirected at the animals, particularly when they are scared and bewildered. This could also lead to the temptation to cut corners and could potentially lead to mistakes, as it's a very physically demanding job. One worker remarks to another: "I don't think there's going to be a great deal of lambs to kill today. Probably about 1,500."

Issues at the restraint conveyer loading point/race

We have concerns about the design and layout of the loading area. There wasn't a natural 'flow' for ease of movement for the animals.

The animals were moved from the lairage into a holding pen, from where they were supposed to be loaded individually into the conveyer restrainer, a mechanised way of moving the animals diagonally up into the slaughter area. At the mouth of the restrainer, the animals may have felt more hesitant about going forwards, as they may have detected that the floor is falling away. Essentially, with no false flooring at the base, it created a visual cliff effect.

We were also concerned to see a number of line pauses, with the animals held in the restraint conveyer, which would have created further distress.

Before they even went to the knife, sheep were treated with shocking brutality. Sheep were dragged along by their throats and pulled by their ears, picked up by their fleeces, as well as being kicked, slapped, shouted at, or kneed roughly into the mouth of the conveyer restrainer. When animals became 'stacked' on top of each other in the conveyer, they were often pulled backwards by their legs or left to travel upside down in the conveyer.

We would like to flag the following incidents as being of particular concern:

- One worker often grabbed sheep by their throats or fleeces and toppled or threw the animals backwards into the conveyer, or sent them flying into metal pen sides, often with an audible crash. On a number of occasions, two of the workers left the bewildered sheep to travel upside down and backwards up the conveyer towards the slaughter-line.
- One sheep became trapped in the conveyer and eventually fell through, unnoticed by the worker. On another occasion a worker notices a trapped sheep and climbs up onto the conveyer and stamps on her back to force her to drop through, onto the floor below.
- One worker regularly had his hands clamped over the animals' muzzles, sometimes wrenching their heads back as they struggled. This was often for extended periods of time, including 52 seconds, 29 seconds and 22 seconds.
- On one occasion, a worker even sits on a sheep.
- A worker leans his body right over two sheep who are crushed side by side in the conveyer.
- A sheep is grabbed by the ear and pulled backwards from on top of another sheep.
- A worker continues to knee and kick at a sheep who is positioned in the conveyer, with nowhere to move to.

- A worker deliberately slams the metal gate on sheep and the other worker appears to encourage this by saying "bash it onto them". On another occasion, a worker kicks the pen or gate deliberately in order to scare the sheep.
- A worker swears at a sheep on a couple of occasions.
- A worker uses the EID reader to poke a sheep in the rump.
- A visibly lame sheep enters the loading pen.

There are anecdotal reports of sheep potentially being left in the lairage all weekend, a sheep found dead in the lairage but with no cause inferred. There was also some discussion of an unspecified number of sheep being found dead in the lairage with the worker questioning whether the water drinking devices were actually re-filled:

- Some sheep appear to have been left all weekend in the lairage, as per "Seems that we already have some. Some of the sheep have been here all weekend."
- A sheep appears to have been found dead in the lairage, as per "there's one dead in there".
- An unspecified number of sheep appear to have been found dead in the lairage, as per: "move them dead sheep" to which another worker replies: "did you do all the drinkers?".

Issues in the stunning and slaughter area

- A worker fails to properly stun a sheep, who surges forwards onto the cutting table. Two workers pin her down, and whilst she would appear to be fully conscious, her throat is cut.
- A stun-man roughly picks up a sheep, hurls a sheep backwards down the slaughter conveyer line, whilst angrily shouting. She had likely been poorly loaded into the conveyer and was walking up the line on the backs of other sheep. On another occasion a sheep surges forward and the worker fails to catch her as she topples from the table. The slaughter-man stuns the sheep for 0.5 seconds, whilst she is in the arms of the stun-man. She doesn't appear to be sufficiently stunned.
- A sheep is thrashing strongly on the shackle line following a brief stun, both legs break free of the shackles and she drops into the blood pit. She is hauled

out by the workers and simply hung back up with no checks for consciousness nor any attempt to re-stun her.

- The stunning process was often utterly incompetent. Workers were seen misapplying tongs to the animals' necks, snouts and faces and even to the leg of an animal on one occasion.
- One worker holds the tongs hesitantly and jabs at the faces of the sheep. He doesn't initially appear to receive any instruction. He is not wearing rubber gloves.
- Many stuns appeared very brief, often just a second or less, and there appeared to be no checks for signs of consciousness. We are deeply concerned that some of the animals may have been inadequately stunned and therefore may have been conscious when they went to the knife.
- The fast-paced line appeared to compound matters. A sheep was stunned roughly every 10 to 12 seconds. Workers were overheard saying, "Fast killing now, 850 good, 700 not so good".
- On the single occasion that the Official Vet (OV) checks up on the worker stunning sheep, his behaviour completely changes. As her back is turned and her attention is on hosing off her boots, the worker continues with the same short stuns. She turns around. They both look up at what may be a visual device such as a stun assurance monitor for the electrode application, but this is out of the view of our covert camera. The length of stun increases significantly to three seconds each time on five consecutive occasions in the presence of the OV. Sheep appear to have once again been poorly loaded into the conveyer leading to issues along the line at point of slaughter. Two sheep arrive, one stacked on top of the other. The worker that is undertaking stunning pulls one sheep from below the other. The placement of the stunning tong would appear to be good, spanning the brain. For the third, fourth and fifth stun, the animal's head rises into view and the forelegs are extended, which are signs of the animal entering the 'tonic' phase post-stun. The worker also shackles one of the animals by one leg, which is the more conventional method, the others he shackles by two. **Neither the worker nor the OV appear to check the animals for signs of consciousness, post-stun, even in the presence of the official vet.**

As Farmers Fresh was established recently, the premises should fall under the following 'REGULATION 1099/2009 Requirement:

'Article 14 / Annex II existing slaughterhouses Electrical stunning equipment. Must be fitted with device that displays and records the electrical parameters for each animal. Device must be placed so clearly visible to personnel.

Presence of CCTV at the slaughterhouse

We understand that there was CCTV present at Farmers Fresh, but without legislation in place to determine where it was sited and how it should be monitored, this failed to prevent the serious problems we uncovered. For example, an infra-red camera was present to cover the stun/kill area, but a worker standing in the stun area would likely obscure the view of the killing, as this was in line from the camera.

Of course, cameras alone do not deter law-breaking, and unless the footage is properly monitored, Food Business Operators (FBOs) do not detect – or do not report – these breaches. It is unknown whether the FBO failed to monitor their cameras properly or whether they monitored them and simply failed to take sufficient action to prevent the abuse. We have no insight into the access granted to the Official Vet, in order to monitor the footage. There have even been historical cases where FBOs have failed to hand over CCTV footage. Either way, the voluntary system of installation is not working, and it is now time to make cameras mandatory, and task an independent body that has animal welfare as its priority with monitoring the footage.

Without our covert cameras in place, this horrendous situation may have continued, unchecked for some time.

The Welsh government has made available voluntary funding for small-to-medium-sized slaughterhouses, as part of the 'Food Business Investment Scheme' which would cover the installation, upgrade or improvement of CCTV, as a priority, in order to 'level the playing field' for smaller businesses. As mentioned, Farmers Fresh slaughterhouse had CCTV installed but without rules pertaining to its placement, use, operation and storage it cannot truly be deemed an effective tool.

Animal Aid submitted the following Freedom of Information (FOI) request for slaughterhouse breaches, specifically for Wales.

30th April 2019

Dear FOI, Complaints and Transparency Team,

I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information from the Food Standards Agency regarding animal welfare incidents in Welsh slaughterhouses between 5 April 2017 and 21 December 2018:

- (1) The total number of animal-welfare related incidents recorded for the specified period. And for these to be classified by the total number ranked at level 4 (critical

non-compliance), level 3 (serious non-compliance) and level 2 (minor non-compliance) with level 1 pertaining to compliance.

- (2) For this period, how many 'welfare enforcement notices' were issued, how many incidents were 'referred for investigation', how many had 'written advice' notices issued and how many cases of 'verbal advice' were issued?
- (3) How many incidents of 'operative kicked or hit an animal', 'ineffective stunning', 'incompetent slaughter-man – stunning and killing', 'failure to sever both carotid arteries' and 'no monitoring of animals to ensure unconscious until death' occurred during the specified period?

The response was sent in the form of a spreadsheet, as follows:

A	B
Count of non-compliance score	Wales
2 - Minor non-compliance	33
3 - Serious non-compliance	28
4 - Critical non-compliance	15
Grand Total	76

Count of non-compliance action	Wales
Referred for Investigation	2
Verbal Advice	65
Welfare Enforcement Notice	2
Written Advice	7
Grand Total	76

Count of non-compliance type	Wales
Failure to sever both carotid arteries	0
Incompetent slaughterman - Stunning and Killing	0
Ineffective stunning	1
No monitoring of animals to ensure unconscious until death	0
Operative kicked/ hit an animal	2
Grand Total	3

These FOI findings clearly show that there are issues across the board, at multiple slaughterhouses. Over the course of a year there were 15 cases of critical non-compliance.

The FSA states: 'Welfare practices were observed as failing to comply with legislative requirements, and there was evidence of animals suffering avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations or a contravention poses a serious and imminent risk to animal welfare. Welfare of animals during transportation was seriously compromised with evidence of animals suffering unnecessary or avoidable pain, distress or suffering.'

It is also highly concerning to note two cases of 'operative kicked/ hit an animal, which would have taken place in front of an official.

Of course, Animal Aid believes that slaughter can never be cruelty-free, since no animal wants to die. However, we feel that mandatory, independently monitored CCTV would be a major step forward. It would help to prevent the shocking brutality that we have repeatedly filmed inside slaughterhouses in England, and that we have now witnessed inside a major Welsh slaughterhouse.

Further information

Animal Aid previously commissioned a report entitled '**CCTV Monitoring in Slaughterhouse's**', by a team of independent experts. This found that the cost of independent monitoring of CCTV inside England's slaughterhouses is likely to cost between £150,000 and £370,000 a year – a figure 'far from prohibitive'.

The report sets out how an independent system of monitoring might be conducted, what it would cost and how it might be funded. Crucially, the report's authors – who are drawn from Cormack Economics and HEC Associates – endorse the current regulatory ethos that says the cost of regulation should fall to industry and consumers, not to government and taxpayers.

The report is available to download here:

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/RotherhamReport.pdf>

The farming industry itself appears to be outraged by the findings of our investigation into Farmers Fresh, as per the following comments on publicly available farming forum:

'Just needs cctv installing like in English abattoirs'

'I hope they all go to jail; company directors down, including the vet...'

From:

<https://thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/cruelty-reports-at-wrexham-abattoir.299484/#post-6541429>

And this report from the Farm Animal Welfare Council is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/325241/FAWC_report_on_the_welfare_of_farmed_animals_at_slaughter_or_killing_part_one_red_meat_animals.pdf

The Humane Slaughter Association guidance on best practice stunning is available here:

<https://www.hsa.org.uk/killing-mammals-using-electricity-two-stage-application/killing-mammals-using-electricity-two-stage-application>