

**P-05-916: Adequate funding to protect the welfare of farm animals in Welsh slaughterhouses, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 12.11.19**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the reply sent by the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs to the Chair of the Petitions Committee regarding the above petition. I should like to make the following points:

1 The Minister refers to the difficulties public sector organisations face regarding the identification and funding of priorities, particularly in the context of decreasing budgets. This is understood. However, it would surely be expected that the welfare of animals at the time of their slaughter would be considered a high priority and, even in the context of budget limitations, would be afforded a reasonable level of funding. This appears not to be the case.

2 There are 23 operational slaughterhouses in Wales (ie those currently audited by the Food Standards Agency (FSA))<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 18.5 million farm animals a year are reared in Wales<sup>2</sup>. These comprise 1.1 million cattle, 10 million sheep, 7.5 million poultry and 24,000 pigs. Details of total throughput of animals in Welsh slaughterhouses is not readily available (data is most often aggregated with England). However, while not all animals reared each year are slaughtered, a high proportion will be and it is likely the majority reared in Wales will be slaughtered in Welsh slaughterhouses. Funding for Wales necessarily requires to ensure the proper protection under slaughter regulations of many millions of animals each year.

3 The FSA responsibilities which require such funding include oversight of official veterinarians in slaughterhouses (OVs), time for OV welfare checks, conduct of inspections, undertaking of regular audits, conducting follow up inspection visits where failures are identified, pursuing investigations, pursuing enforcement action including potential prosecution, provision of advice, and others.

4 For 2018/2019 the Welsh Government provided just £20,187 to enable the FSA to ensure animal welfare controls are implemented across all these 23 slaughterhouses<sup>3</sup>. For the three years prior to this (ie 2015 to 2018) it provided in total only £33,627 (ie approximately £11,200 per annum)<sup>3</sup>.

Note - The FSA funding contribution made by the Welsh Government is often represented jointly with that made by DEFRA to enable animal welfare controls across the 278 slaughterhouses operational in both England and Wales. Prior to 2018/2019 this joint amount was just £50,000 per annum. The joint DEFRA/Welsh Government contribution to the FSA was increased in 2018/2019 to £170,000 per annum, the increase provided by DEFRA being in large part to address costs associated with oversight of the new requirement for all English slaughterhouses to introduce CCTV during 2018/2019, rather than representing increased funding to address animal welfare controls.

5 The Minister states that *'to ensure maximum impact officials meet FSA colleagues to agree priorities within the funding available'*. There was a meeting of the FSA Board in September 2018 which was specifically dedicated to the consideration of animal welfare at slaughter. The FSA Board papers for the meeting state clearly that funding contributions under the Service Level Agreement by DEFRA and the Welsh Government *'does not meet the true costs of official welfare controls which we conservatively estimate to be in excess of £1m, only a small proportion of which is recovered from industry'* (FSA Animal Welfare Update, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018, paragraph 24).

6 The funding provided by the Welsh Government (and DEFRA too) to enable animal welfare controls in slaughterhouses to be fully implemented and ensured are clearly massively inadequate. Even considering the enhanced joint funding provided in 2018/2019, it still represents less than

20% of the amount the FSA itself states that it needs. The amounts provided by the Welsh Government do not represent the commitment *'to ensuring high standards of welfare for all animals kept in Wales, at all stages of their life, including at the point of slaughter'* that the Minister implies.

7 The Minister states, *'The Welsh Government also works with industry and other stakeholders to ensure the high standards of animal welfare at the time of killing are met'*. This presupposes high standards are being met but evidence contradicts this. The FSA undertakes regular pre-announced audits of slaughterhouses and publishes the results of these on its web-site<sup>1</sup>. These represent the primary formal published data on slaughterhouse performance. Against both animal welfare and food hygiene criteria each slaughterhouse is rated on a four-point scale comprising: Good, Generally Satisfactory, Improvement Needed, and Urgent Improvement Needed. For audits published up to March 2019, only 30% of Welsh slaughterhouses received a 'Good' rating. While most received a 'Generally Satisfactory' rating this is a far lower standard than citizens have a right to expect. That only 30% achieved a 'Good' rating with full notice of an audit is very concerning.

8 Concerns about welfare standards in Welsh slaughterhouses have been further brought to a head by the recent widespread publication of the outcomes of an undercover investigation at the Farmers Fresh slaughterhouse in Wrexham<sup>5</sup>. This showed multiple instances of welfare abuse and outright cruelty with a criminal investigation now underway. A follow-up undercover investigation a few weeks later found further appalling instances of cruelty even though the premises was now supposed to be being closely monitored<sup>6</sup>. Equivalent investigations in England have found that such breaches occurred in almost all slaughterhouses investigated. It is reasonable to assume that the Farmers Fresh failures in welfare standards may be occurring in other Welsh slaughterhouses too.

9 It seems highly likely that the failure over many years to properly fund welfare controls in Welsh slaughterhouses will have contributed to the widespread mediocre standards reported on audit, and the clear risk of significant welfare breaches and cruelty now evidenced in a Welsh slaughterhouse and potentially occurring in others.

10 In her letter to the Chair of the Petitions Committee, the Minister has devoted much space to the discussion of the introduction of CCTV, and the Welsh Government strategy in relation to this. This misses the point and is not directly relevant to the petition. The issue of inadequate funding of animal welfare controls and of the installation and use of CCTV are separate, albeit related, issues. At all times it is essential that the regulations to protect animal welfare at slaughter are thoroughly monitored and properly enforced. Adequate funding is needed to ensure this on an ongoing basis. Such monitoring and enforcement is an ongoing requirement whether CCTV is used or not. Where it is used of course, unless there is the basic funding to make use of the data it provides (eg by OV's, FSA staff etc), then it is unlikely to be effective.

The levels of funding provided by the Welsh Government to enable animal welfare controls in slaughterhouses are entirely inadequate to do so in relation to the range of controls needed, the number of slaughterhouses to be covered and the many millions of animals 'processed' by them each year. Citizens have a right to expect that the welfare of farm animals is protected as far as possible at the time of their killing and that regulations are properly enforced. Significantly increased funding to do this is urgently required.

Yours

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Welsh citizen

## References

1 FSA audits of approved meat establishments

<https://data.gov.uk/dataset/43038f2d-6d94-4e6d-bbf9-04bf58726ad3/fsa-audits-of-approved-meat-establishments>

2 StatsWales

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Agriculture/Agricultural-Survey/Annual-Survey-Results/total-livestock-in-wales-by-year>

3 Freedom of Information request AT1SN 12673 to Welsh Government

4 Food Standards Agency (2018) Animal Welfare Update 2018

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-18-09-05-animal-welfare-update-amends.pdf>

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

6 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-7610173/Hidden-camera-reveals-sheep-getting-stuck-conveyor-belt-dead-ones-placed-live-ones.html>