



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH & CONSUMER DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
Directorate F - Food and Veterinary Office

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**OVERVIEW REPORT ON
A SERIES OF FACT FINDING MISSIONS IN 2011
CONCERNING ANIMAL WELFARE AT SLAUGHTER
IN NON EU COUNTRIES WITH REGARD TO FUTURE
COMPLIANCE WITH
REGULATION (EC) NO. 1099/2009**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission's Health and Consumer Directorate General carried out nine missions between February and October 2011 to non EU countries which export meat to the EU. These were carried out on a fact finding basis to see how current slaughterhouse operations match the future requirements of Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 which apply from 1.1.2013.

This overview report concludes that much development work has already been done by the industry and the competent authorities in countries exporting meat to the EU, and that these countries are well on their way to satisfying the requirements of Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009.

The major problem for animal welfare was that the electrical parameters used for waterbath stunning of poultry were not set at levels which ensured that birds were effectively stunned. In addition there are meat quality issues when higher currents are used. Other areas to be further developed include clarification and formalisation of the tasks of the Animal Welfare Officer; certifying competence of the relevant staff; adapting and improving or completing the existing standard operating procedures. Several countries need to make changes to their transport/delivery practices or to the arrangements for accommodating animals, so that they respect the requirement to feed and bed animals if not slaughtered within 12 hours of their arrival at the slaughterhouse.

The Commission services will follow-up with the countries concerned the issues raised regarding future compliance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Certificates accompanying exports of meat to the EU testify that the meat comes from "animals which have been treated in the slaughterhouse before and at the time of slaughter or killing in accordance with the relevant provisions of Union legislation".

In 2011 the Food and Veterinary Office carried out nine audits in non EU countries which export meat to the EU regarding current slaughterhouse operations and how these match the future requirements of Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 which apply from 1.1.2013.

This Regulation requires a stronger system of Business Operator supervision than was previously the case. This includes requirements regarding the layout, construction and equipment of slaughterhouses, handling and restraining of animals and stunning and slaughter. There is also a need for training of slaughterhouse personnel and for an animal welfare officer to supervise operations and report directly to the Business Operator.

2. THE LAYOUT CONSTRUCTION AND EQUIPMENT OF SLAUGHTERHOUSES

The layout of slaughterhouses did not present major problems; however there was a greater awareness of the suitability of stunning equipment for the different categories of animals than the categories and weights for which the restraining equipment was appropriate. All Business Operators had provided data to the competent authorities on the maximum number of animals per hour for their slaughter lines as well as the maximum capacity of each lairage area.

In all countries which experience hot climatic conditions, except one, all lairages had a roof which provided adequate protection from the sun, which could be a particular problem when animals are kept at high stocking rates.

In all poultry slaughterhouses, mechanical ventilation in the lairages was not yet equipped with an alarm. Also in two slaughterhouses in two different countries shackle lines were not positioned to reduce disturbances to a minimum which gave rise to birds receiving pre-stun shocks.

A computerised system in one poultry slaughterhouse automatically registered the key parameters used in electrical stunning; however, the business operators in all other sheep and poultry slaughterhouses using electrical stunning indicated that they needed to get further information on how this could be implemented. In slaughterhouses with existing EU approval, this requirement needs to be addressed by 8.12.2019.

3. HANDLING AND RESTRAINING OF ANIMALS

Injured animals were effectively dealt with in all but one country, where injured animals that should have been subjected to emergency slaughter had remained instead for several hours (overnight) at the unloading ramp/pen.

Handling of animals was good and without the use of prohibited methods in all except one horse slaughterhouse in one country where electric goads were used to move the animals. Use of goads was strictly limited in the other countries and calm quiet handling resulted in quiet conditions in the cattle slaughterhouses. There were more detailed records of checks of lairaging and handling where the Business Operator was meeting private standards requested by certain customers

The vast majority of red meat slaughterhouses do not provide feeding and bedding for animals which have not been slaughtered within 12 hours of their arrival, which represents a high percentage of animals slaughtered.

In the majority of cattle slaughterhouses the stunning box was adjustable and allowed animals to be easily restrained.

4. STUNNING AND SLAUGHTER

All Business Operators were carrying out checks of stunning on a daily basis. It will be a requirement, for new slaughterhouses from 1.1.2013 and for all slaughterhouses from 8.12.2019, that electrical stunning equipment will be fitted with a device which displays and records the details of the electrical key parameters for each animal stunned, or for the waterbath stunning equipment where this is used. In a pig slaughterhouse and a poultry slaughterhouse visited in one country a computerised system already recorded this data. Regarding the electrical stunning of sheep, such devices were not yet in place. Also Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 requires 1 amp for stunning sheep, but currents lower than this were used.

Article 4 of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 requires all animals to be killed only after stunning in accordance with the methods set out in Annex I of this Regulation, except if subjected to particular methods of slaughter prescribed by religious rites. Slaughter according to religious rites was carried out in many of the slaughterhouses visited. In all cases this was combined with a method of stunning, albeit not always a method prescribed in Annex 1 to Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009. In four countries, prior stunning was accepted as part of religious slaughter and in two countries post cut stunning was practised as part of religious slaughter. Religious slaughter with prior stunning used either electrical stunning or penetrative captive bolt or non-penetrative captive bolt. Following these stunning methods there was no obvious sign of recovery. Cattle were mechanically restrained where religious slaughter was practised.

The use of a non-penetrative captive bolt to stun cattle is not a method prescribed in Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009; however, as slaughter according to religious rites is derogated from following the methods prescribed in the Annex, the non-penetrative bolt may be used when slaughter is carried out following these rites. Calibration of the power of the stun gun and good head fixation were used in one country to avoid skull fractures which can result from this stunning method. Skull fractures imply that the force of the stun has been dissipated and that the stun may not have been effective. In another country where the same method was used, insufficient attention had been given to proper head restraint or calibration of the gun and there was a higher percentage of skull fractures.

In one country bleeding was performed after electro-immobilisation had been applied. The use of electro-immobilisation immediately after stunning could mask signs of recovery in inadequately or poorly stunned cattle. Similarly the continued application of electro-immobilisation could mean that signs of life are not properly evaluated before commencing to dress the carcass.

In three non-EU countries exporting poultry meat to the EU, the majority of poultry were slaughtered according to religious rites. In such cases the birds first passed through a waterbath stunner; however, the currents provided were lower than specified in Annex 1 to Regulation 1099/2009 and there was evidence of recovery of birds during the slaughter process. Two slaughterhouses visited, in two different countries, did not slaughter according to religious rites. In one, electrical currents for stunning were also lower than those in the Annex to Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009, whereas in the second country the Business Operator was obliged by national legislation to use currents higher than those in Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009; however, the Business Operator complained that this resulted in major problems for meat quality.

Article 16(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 provides that monitoring procedures should include indicators to detect signs of unconsciousness and consciousness. The best practices seen used multiple indicators for the various stunning methods, and when water bath stunning was practised, took account of the electrical parameters applied.

5. TRAINING OF STAFF

In most cases staff in charge of handling, slaughter and bleeding of animals had been trained by an outside provider, whereas in-house training had taken place in a minority of establishments. Best practice involved government accredited training, where registered training organisations provide training at establishment level. The CA assess the outcome of training, while industry bodies, whose members pay part of the costs, also ensure the quality provided. As a result training is delivered on site using standardised materials customised for each species.

6. ANIMAL WELFARE OFFICER

Animal Welfare Officers (AWO) had been appointed in each establishment and were active in this role in all areas where live animals are dealt with; however their role was not always clearly specified in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), in particular the requirement to specify that they have sufficient authority to demand corrective action and report directly to the Business Operator.

Article 17 (4) stipulates that the AWO shall hold a certificate of competence as referred to in Article 21 issued for all operations taking place in the slaughterhouses for which he or she is responsible. The AWO needs to be certified as competent in performing the procedures listed in Article 7 of Regulation (EC) 1099/2009. The QA manager in each slaughterhouse often acts as the AWO, and while they had sufficient

knowledge of operations and were able to explain to staff how procedures should be performed.

7. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) covering the activities within the slaughterhouses were at different stages of development. In some countries these were already implemented and only a small number of issues needed to be included to comply with future requirements. In other countries even though they had focused on stunning, they did not contain comprehensive criteria for assessing stunning or the number of animals to be checked. In some cases SOPs indicated practices which were not followed in reality.

In the majority of slaughterhouses SOPs included provisions for maintenance and calibration of stunning equipment.

A model of best practice was where approved industry standards had been developed. These were adopted following discussions with all stakeholders involved. The standards are further outlined by criteria, and checklists are provided for monitoring these criteria. A common example was where 100 animals are observed in the lairage, during handling and at the place of slaughter and targets include:

- No more than 3% slip and no more than 1% fall on being moved in the lairage.
- No more than 3% of cattle and 10% of pigs vocalise during handling.
- No more than 25% of animals are observed to be prodded.
- Less than 1% of sheep vocalise when the electrical stunning equipment is applied.

Quantifying the level of compliance allows the performance of procedures to be measured. It also allows business operators to identify differences over time or between operators and also allows the CA to compare different establishments which are using the same scoring systems.

8. OFFICIAL CONTROLS

Official controls of the activities in EU approved slaughterhouses were generally well developed. Some areas for improvement in relation to the recording of the supervisory activities were identified in a minority of countries.

The system of verification of the business operators' own checks was already implemented in a number of countries, whereas in others OVs relied solely on their own checks.

An example of risk based checks was where the frequency of official controls was set on the basis of the performance of the plant, i.e. high levels of compliance resulted in reduced checks. As the Business Operators were paying for each control there is a financial incentive to operate with a reduced frequency of controls.

9. OVERALL CONCLUSION

Much development work has already been done by industry and the competent authorities in countries exporting meat to the EU, and these countries are well on their way to satisfying the requirements of Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009.

The major problem for animal welfare was that the electrical parameters used for waterbath stunning of poultry were not set at levels which ensured that birds were effectively stunned. In addition there are meat quality issues when higher currents are used. Other areas to be further developed include clarification and formalisation of the tasks of the Animal Welfare Officer; certifying competence of the relevant staff; adapting and improving or completing the existing standard operating procedures. Several countries need to make changes to their transport/delivery practices or to the arrangements for accommodating animals, so that they respect the requirement to feed and bed animals if not slaughtered within 12 hours of their arrival at the slaughterhouse.

10. ACTION BY COMMISSION SERVICES

The Commission services will follow-up with the countries concerned the issues raised regarding future compliance.

ANNEX I

Relevant legislation for missions

Full Title	O.J. publication details
Council Directive 93/119/EC of 22 December 1993 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing	OJ L 340, 31.12.1993, p.21
Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing	OJ L 303, 18.11.2009, p. 1-30