

Reports and Comments

Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) Opinion on CCTV in slaughterhouses

The UK Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC), an expert committee of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), has published its Opinion on CCTV in Slaughterhouses in response to increasing pressure from lobby groups and others for the introduction of mandatory CCTV use in slaughterhouses.

The report acknowledges that a significant proportion of slaughterhouses already use CCTV (covering 90–98% of animals slaughtered in 2013) and that its use has grown significantly in recent years, driven by support for the technology from NGOs, farm assurance schemes and retailers. Petitions and Early Day Motions calling for mandatory installation of CCTV in slaughterhouses have been put to Government in recent years but none have led to a formal debate or legislation.

The Opinion covers a range of issues including the drivers for CCTV use, the benefits and limitations of CCTV use, the challenges for business operators installing and using CCTV, the legal and ethical issues of observing workers remotely and the long-term impact of CCTV use. The Opinion was based on a written consultation, information from relevant industry and legislative bodies and the published scientific literature.

FAWC believes that CCTV offers a range of benefits for both observation and recording of slaughterhouse operations. The benefits include the ability to store footage for lengthy periods of time, the potential for footage to be used as a training tool, the ability to monitor inaccessible places (eg inside gas-stunning systems) and the fact that CCTV is unobtrusive to both operations and the animals. Significantly, it also increases public trust in slaughterhouse procedures.

FAWC acknowledges that there are limitations to the use of CCTV and emphasise that the technology cannot replace direct oversight of personnel especially during, for example, training. Major limitations include image quality, the breadth of vision (ie the context), the security of recorded footage and the potential for inconsistencies in the analysis of footage. It is also as yet unproven whether CCTV results in any improvement in welfare compliance.

Emphasising that CCTV should only be used “as an adjunct and accompaniment to physical observation and supervisory presences” and that the installation of CCTV should not be used as a reason for any reduction in physical observation, FAWC concludes that CCTV should be installed in all areas of the slaughterhouse where live animals are kept and where animals are stunned and killed.

Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) Opinion on CCTV in Slaughterhouses (February 2015). A4, 22 pages. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fawc-opinion-on-cctv-in-slaughterhouses>.

NR Williams,

HSA

AWIN welfare assessment protocols: donkeys, goats, horses, sheep and turkeys

The culmination of a four-year long project co-funded by the European Commission, these five assessment protocols have been produced by a network of animal welfare scientists, veterinarians and other stakeholders working across Europe and elsewhere, for the Animal Welfare Indicators (AWIN) project.

Building on previous work by the Welfare Quality® project (<http://www.welfarequalitynetwork.net>), AWIN sought to develop on-farm protocols for assessing the welfare of farmed animals not covered in this previous project, with a particular focus on pain assessment and recognition. This was challenging because the species that the AWIN project addressed: donkeys, goats, horses, sheep and turkeys are less well researched than those of the Welfare Quality® (pigs, poultry, dairy and beef cattle). In addition, the conditions in which the species are kept are more heterogeneous.

Much of the methodology, concepts and use of language in these protocols will be familiar to those who have read those produced by Welfare Quality®. Each AWIN protocol is broken down into (at least) five sections. The material contained within the Introduction, Aims and Preliminary information is, in the main, similar for each protocol and deals with the preliminary information that is relevant for applying the protocol. The real core of each protocol are the 4th and 5th sections. In the 4th section, the assessment protocol for the species in question is outlined, both for an initial quick screen (level 1 assessment) and a second more in-depth and robust assessment. In the 5th, the procedure by which an outcome for the assessed farm is generated is detailed, including the decision process to determine whether it is necessary to conduct a more in-depth (level 2) welfare assessment. The protocols also contain Appendices in which the recording sheets to collect data are given.

The protocols are animal-based and seek to assess the welfare of the relevant species predominantly through observation of groups of individuals — although there are elements of handling in most of the protocols.

The assessment protocols are quite specific, with age and/or production goal influencing their validity. For example, the donkey protocol is suitable only for those over a year old, the horse for horses over five years old that have been used for different activities, and the sheep for adult females over a year old kept for milk and/or meat.

Each of the protocols gives advice on how to prepare to carry out the assessment and details how the protocol should be carried out, including how many animals should be assessed (dependent upon numbers kept on the farm), which assessments should be carried out outside or within