

## Letter

### Survey of slaughter plants from an animal welfare standpoint in Eastern Turkey

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Turkey, a candidate for EU membership, has a large livestock sector in the east of the country with considerable numbers of slaughter animals. This survey examined welfare practices in fifteen slaughter plants located in the region surrounding five cities (Bingol, Erzurum, Elazig, Kars and Van) in eastern Turkey. Evaluation criteria were developed on the basis of minimum requirements of EU animal welfare legislation for slaughter animals (Anonymous 1979). The plants, which were designed and used for cattle and sheep slaughter, were visited and slaughter procedures observed in April 2006. The criteria and results are presented in Table 1.

Notwithstanding EU animal welfare legislation, Turkey has its own animal health legislation (Anonymous 1989) which includes directives regarding the criteria presented in Table 1 (Section 1). Five of the 15 plants did not have loading ramps, forcing animals to jump from the back of trucks and sometimes causing injuries. Six plants were without shelters or barns to protect animals from the extremes of weather. Seven plants lacked feed and watering facilities. Animals were prevented from resting pre-slaughter in 10 plants and in 11 plants animals' pregnancy status was not assessed by veterinarians. Most plants were found to have adequate drainage systems which were in acceptable working order. Our findings revealed a number of defects in Government inspection systems and controls relating specifically to plants' structure and function.

Turkey's animal health legislation regarding slaughter only includes the statement that the slaughtering should not be stressful for the animals and there are no specific directives concerning pre-slaughter handling facilities and/or methods for reducing stress. Section 2 (of Table 1) presents a number of requirements for better welfare clearly defined in the EU

animal welfare legislation and an evaluation of the results for plants in Turkey. There was no system in place for the milking of lactating animals forced to wait in excess of 24 h, pre-slaughter, in these plants. In 10 out of 15 plants, animals were not packed closely together during transportation to the slaughter hall and in 9 plants floors were observed as non-slippery and non-traumatic. In 10 plants, animals were forced to move by using prods or sticks and handled roughly in the slaughter hall. Eight plants had quiet ambience while, in six, animals were prevented from seeing slaughter. Plant workers admitted that they had undergone occasional training in hygiene but never in animal welfare. Animals were restrained by shackling from a hind leg in all plants. In 11 plants, slaughter men made transverse cuts in the neck, using a reciprocal, uninterrupted motion of the knife however, in 4 others, cutting actions were rated careless and inexperienced. With the exception of one plant, slaughtermen waited for blood to flow for at least five minutes before starting other processes. Pre-slaughter handling facilities, some of which are mentioned above, should be clearly defined in the animal health legislation and legislation should be reconstituted according to the welfare requirements of slaughter animals.

One of the prerequisites/desirable practices for the welfare of slaughter animals is stunning. With the exception of a couple of demonstrations held by academics in Istanbul University, stunning of ruminants has never been practised in Turkey. Despite the Turkish Religious Presidency's declaration that stunning did not contravene Islamic rules (Anonymous 2006), Turkish people are yet to openly back this directive. Religious authorities and animal scientists need to collaborate, informing people of the religion's true stance on stunning.

The new treaty establishing a constitution for the EU, signed by the heads of States of the 25 member States as well as three candidate countries including Turkey, on the 29th October 2004, aimed to ensure the protection of animals. Current conditions in slaughter plants indicate generally poor welfare. Animal welfare issues should be urgently legalised and/or improved to accommodate EU standards and ensure animal welfare in slaughter plants and other animal-related fields in Turkey.

#### References

- Anonymous** 1979 *European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter*. [http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/references/slaughter/jour137\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/references/slaughter/jour137_en.pdf) (Accessed October 21 2006)
- Anonymous** 1989 *Legislations for Animal Health*. Ministry of Agriculture, Turkey. Official Gazette in Turkey March 1989. Basbakanlik Mevzuati Gelistirme ve Yayin Genel Mudurlugu Necatibey Cad No 1084: Bakanliklar-Ankara 06100, Turkey
- Anonymous** 2006 *Presidency of Religious Duties*. <http://www.diyaret.gov.tr> (Accessed May 15 2006)

**Table I** Evaluation criteria and welfare practice in selected slaughter plants.

Criteria	Slaughterhouses in the different city ranges in Eastern Turkey															Total (out of 15)
	Erzurum (5)					Bingol (3)			Elazig (3)			Kars (2)		Van (2)		
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	
<i>Section 1</i>																
Loading ramp is available	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	10
Shelter or barn is available	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	9
Barn ventilation is sufficient <sup>†</sup>		-	-	-		+	+		+				+	-	+	5
Feed and water equipment is present	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	8
Animal rested prior to slaughter	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	5
Pregnancy tested	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	4
Drainage sufficient <sup>‡</sup>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	13
<i>Section 2</i>																
Lactating cows milked if required to wait > 24 h <sup>§</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Animals transferred comfortably to slaughter hall <sup>#</sup>	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	10
Floors not slippery or liable to cause trauma <sup>†</sup>	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	9
Animals were not forcibly moved <sup>#</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	5
Slaughter hall had quiet ambience <sup>°</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	8
Animals did not view slaughter of conspecifics <sup>†</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	6
Workers had undergone specific welfare training <sup>‡</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Appropriate methods of restraint were used <sup>§</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Slaughtermen respect need for sudden, uninterrupted cut <sup>#</sup>	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	11
Slaughtermen waited for at least five minutes for bloodflow <sup>†</sup>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	14
Total (out of 17)	4	6	8	6	3	14	9	5	12	8	9	0	7	12	14	

<sup>†</sup> A ventilation system was present and caused no discomfort even during long periods in the barn.

<sup>‡</sup> The floor of the slaughter room was not covered in puddles of blood.

<sup>§</sup> Where possible a veterinarian was used.

<sup>#</sup> Animals were led individually and not crushed together.

<sup>†</sup> Animals did not lose their footing on wet, slippery flooring.

<sup>°</sup> Animals were not subject to prodding or poking with harmful tools to move them (two or more animals out of 40 constituted a negative score).

<sup>°</sup> Two people were able to talk without shouting in the slaughter room.

<sup>†</sup> Slaughter room structure or due care of employee in taking animal individually.

<sup>‡</sup> One course enough to confer a positive score.

<sup>§</sup> Pre-slaughter animals were not hung by the back leg and remained upright.

<sup>#</sup> Two or more animals out of 40 constituted a negative score.

<sup>†</sup> Two or more animals out of 40 constituted a negative score.