

Reports and Comments

UK Report on the welfare of poultry and rabbits at slaughter or killing

The UK's Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) has published the second of its recent reports on the welfare of farmed animals at slaughter or killing (the first, on red meat animals, was published in 2003). This Report (see details below) deals with broilers, laying hens, turkeys, ducks, geese, game birds and rabbits. The number of animals involved is very substantial with approximately 839 million chickens, 15 million turkeys and 17 million ducks and geese killed in Great Britain each year. The last time this subject was reviewed by FAWC was in 1982 (FAWC Report on the *Welfare of Poultry at the Time of Slaughter*) and at that time a number of recommendations for improving welfare at slaughter or killing were made. The new Report seeks to promote further developments.

The Report is divided into three parts with a series of Annexes. The main findings are presented in the section entitled 'Welfare issues' which covers a range of activities, from catching and loading of birds on-farm, to the design and approval of equipment used. The Report makes 53 recommendations for improvements in animal welfare. These are aimed mainly at the Government and various sections of the industry, mainly slaughterhouse operators and, to a lesser extent, equipment manufacturers.

FAWC makes two general recommendations regarding the welfare of 'white meat' animals (poultry and rabbits). Firstly, that guidance on the welfare of poultry at slaughter or killing should be converted to a statutory Code of Practice; and secondly, that monitoring and control systems based on welfare considerations, and including critical control points, should be put into place in slaughterhouses.

A number of recommendations are made on the catching and transporting of birds, including a legal requirement for members of catching teams to undergo training. It is also recommended that workers on the shackle line undergo training and that changes be made to existing shackle lines to improve bird welfare. However, in the longer term, FAWC would wish to see the inversion and shackling of all poultry phased out. In the meantime, FAWC favours the use of 'stun-to-kill' systems to ensure bird welfare once the stun has been administered. There are a number of recommendations for Government action, including assessing developments in high frequency AC and pulsed DC stunning; funding research into electrical pathways through poultry during stunning; and co-operation with industry in developing electrical stunning systems which address the welfare concerns associated with the use of variable current and live shackling.

Concerning controlled atmosphere stunning (CAS) systems, FAWC recommend that legislation be amended to permit gas mixtures currently banned in Great Britain, but used elsewhere in Europe, to be used in the future. It also recommends that research into CAS should continue in order to clarify any welfare issues, and to develop new gas mixtures

and equipment, including systems for small-scale processors. Current operating systems should, where necessary, be modified in order to comply with the legal requirement that birds can be monitored visually while they are in the chamber.

FAWC is in agreement with the scientific consensus that slaughter without pre-stunning causes avoidable pain and distress, and concludes that all birds should be stunned before slaughter. It recommends that the Government should engage with the relevant communities to ensure that avoidable pain and distress is prevented. It also recommends that where poultry are likely to experience pain or distress the manipulation of the neck cut should not take place.

For emergency culling of poultry, FAWC recommends the use of an effective concussive killing method, believes that neck dislocation should continue to be permitted for culling small numbers of small birds, but wants concussive methods to be further refined and developed. During mass killing of poultry for emergency disease control, animal welfare must be considered at all stages. It is recommended that the Government, together with industry, should give high priority to developing methods for using foam as a vector for killing poultry on-farm.

FAWC makes a number of recommendations regarding training, in particular that Government and industry ensure that there are appropriate schemes in place for training farmers, stockmen, slaughterhouse workers, field professionals and others involved in killing animals. It is also recommended that a system for the independent assessment and approval of slaughterhouse equipment be established to ensure that the equipment is fit for purpose.

Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part 2: White Meat Animals (May 2009). A4, 52 pages. Available free of charge from: Farm Animal Welfare Council, Area 5A, 9 Millbank, c/o Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR. www.fawc.org.uk.

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EFSA issued Scientific Opinions on the main EU systems for stunning and killing farmed fish

Following a request from the European Commission, on 14 April 2009, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) panel on Animal Health and Welfare published four Scientific Opinions on the species-specific welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing eels, rainbow trout, Atlantic salmon and seabass and seabream. On 27 April, the panel released a further Opinion on the welfare aspects of stunning and killing of carp, on 6 May a report of the same kind regarding tuna and, finally, an Opinion on the stunning and killing of European turbot on 11 May.

Scientific Opinions are produced by EFSA's Scientific Committee and are one of the main outputs of EFSA's risk assessment work. These recent reports have been compiled by amalgamating expert advice from the various Animal Health