

Written evidence submitted by The UK Abattoir Network (MAAB0062)

In the context of the Government's proposed ban on the export of live animals for slaughter and fattening, more widely in respect of UK livestock production, food supply resilience and the implications for animal welfare, abattoirs have a crucial role. There is increasing recognition for the key role of a network of local abattoirs across the UK, but the number of operators continues to fall. Whilst there is a role for larger operators, it is self-evident that a local network requires a range of smaller, medium as well as large abattoirs, to ensure choice, sustainability, resilience and animal welfare. Domestic slaughterhouse capacity is not just about the total capacity, it is the required capacity for a range of needs, in the right places. After the publication of several reports on this issue, including from the 2020 All Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) [report](#), 'An Inquiry Into Small Red Meat Abattoir Provision', the [Abattoir Sector Group](#) (ASG) has recently brought together key stakeholders comprising of industry, welfare and veterinary to support the smaller-scale abattoirs vital to this local network across the UK and to provide views on policy to Defra and the devolved administrations.

Key Priorities to address:

1. Government

Ministerial oversight, along with clear and joined up policy within relevant teams in Defra, its agencies and devolved administrations should recognise abattoirs, specifically including the smaller-scale abattoirs vital to an adequate local network, as a strategic national asset and integral to their future visions for sustainable farming and food resilience. The ASG has not so far been able to obtain an action focused response from Defra. The operational policy lead for abattoirs has changed three times in the past two years and there continues to be a lack of understanding of the key issues facing smaller abattoirs.

Recommendation

- The Ministers responsible for abattoirs, specifically to include the network of smaller and medium sized local abattoirs, should appoint a senior Policy lead for abattoirs within Defra and within each devolved administration and their food safety and environment and levy agencies. These senior leads would be accountable for regular feedback sessions and engagement to deliver workstreams to sustain an adequate local abattoir network.

2. Regulation

There are a number of examples of varying interpretations of the regulations, inconsistent approaches to implementation and unnecessary constraints which, which have been identified and agreed in Defra and FSA meetings, but have not been actioned. There is also the failure to implement the 5% rule whereby if an abattoir exceeds 1000 'livestock units' (LSU), they will be required to have full veterinary attendance instead of delayed post-mortem inspection. This limit stifles any growth in the small abattoir sector and gold-plates more flexible transposed EU legislation (EU 2019/624).

Recommendations

- The Food Standards Agency, should implement relevant parts of its current Operational Transformation Programme, over the next 18 months as the current 5 year timeframe will be too late to support the current abattoir network.
- Immediate implementation of LSU regulatory flexibility via the 5% rule.
- A task and finish group jointly established by ASG, Governments and their agencies to review and implement flexibilities on Official Controls to ensure resources

are used and flexibilities are implemented where they are of most valuable to industry and regulators and sustain an adequate local abattoir network.. e.g. Cold Inspection/Post Mortem inspection. This to report to Ministers by the end of 2nd quarter 2022

3. Funding

Smaller abattoirs face high costs to upgrade and maintain facilities and the burden of regulatory demands such as CCTV. They have had limited or no access to Government grants. In June 2020 it was stated in the House of Lords that small abattoirs would be able to access funding as an "Ancillary Activity" under the Agricultural Act. However, there has been no engagement with the funding team and recently ASG were told it was now unclear as to whether abattoirs would be eligible for grants.

Recommendations

- That the Government formally reaffirms its' commitment to Parliament that small abattoirs are eligible for funding as an Agriculture Act Ancillary Activity in England.
- The Defra grants team to enter into discussions with ASG as to how funding could be made available and accessible to smaller abattoirs.

4. Waste and By-Products

The APGAW report found the waste collection market is not competitive and smaller abattoirs are facing costs which are too high, combined with a loss in value of hides and skins. There is a need for small abattoirs to handle by-products and waste in a more efficient and cost effective way.

Recommendation

- The Defra team managing the waste integration strategy to consider opportunities for the local abattoir network to be part of the developing local circular waste economy and to report to Ministers by the end of 2nd quarter 2022

5. Business and Marketing

The ASG recognises the importance for small abattoirs to be resilient and sustainable without requiring ongoing operational funding. This requires a better understanding of their role and clear communication from key bodies. Small abattoirs contribute on average £6-7k per annum to the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and feel they get a limited return. Farmers are constrained in flexibility, growth and exploring different business models by not having easy access to clearly signposted services such as private kill.

Recommendations

- That an updated interactive on-line map is provided by AHDB as soon as possible setting out the location of abattoirs and identifying the services they offer e.g. species, private kill, return of 5th quarter, organic or Pasture for Life certification.
- That AHDB look at how they can promote locally produced meat, linked to small scale producers and abattoirs, to consumers and report back to the ASG.
- That the FSA works with the ASG to improve communication to operators.