



HSA's Welfare Update Courses – February 2005

The HSA successfully ran its first two-day series of welfare update courses from 15–17 February 2005, with over 80 delegates attending. The courses were supported by the Meat Training Council and were held at the Thistle Hotel, East Midlands Airport, Derby.

The aim of the courses was to provide an update for all industry staff involved with live animals (up to and including the point of slaughter) on animal welfare improvements in terms of research, technology and practice. The first day was aimed towards the red meat industry while the second day looked at welfare in the white meat industry. It provided a rare opportunity for all levels of the industry to meet and discuss practical and realistic approaches to animal welfare. Delegates ranged from enforcement officials and welfare bodies to industry members. Speakers included industry leaders, top researchers and HSA staff. All of this helped ensure very informative days for everybody involved. The Red Meat day focused on helping to clarify many of the 'red tape' issues affecting the industry including the audit process, changes in legislation and non-compliances, in addition to covering new research on religious slaughter and electrical stunning of cattle (see page 4). The White Meat day covered more practical issues and detailed the advantages and disadvantages of current and emerging slaughter techniques and disease control issues.

Delegates were encouraged to participate fully, with time for discussion after each



presentation as well as practical case studies at the end of each day. The aim of the case studies was for the delegates to utilise the information from the day, as well as their previous experience, and apply them to real life situations.

Due to its success, the HSA has been requested to run this course on an annual basis, providing regular opportunities for discussion of advances in these important areas. The HSA warmly thanks all the speakers who provided their time free of charge. This and subsidy by the HSA, enabled the delegate fees to be kept to a minimum.

Presentation at Glasgow University Vet School

On 20 October 2004, Technical Officer Natalie Simmonds represented the HSA at the annual Animal Welfare Symposium held at Glasgow University Veterinary School. The event, organised by Glasgow University Veterinary Medical Association (GUVMA), is held annually to highlight welfare issues of particular topical concern to the veterinary profession.

The HSA spoke on the topic *Practical aspects of on-farm emergency slaughter*, using our newly released *Emergency Slaughter* video to promote the acceptable methods available for the humane killing of injured, diseased and non-viable livestock.

Around 100 veterinary students attended the symposium, with a number showing interest in footage concerning the humane dispatch of poultry using the Cash Poultry Killer. In view of the low uptake in the industry, this provided a good opportunity to highlight the benefits of the equipment and its potential for use in emergency slaughter and disease control situations.

Chairman's comment

One of the bonuses of joining the UFAW Council is that you find you are not only concerned with UFAW but also with the Humane Slaughter Association (HSA), a charity which makes important contributions with a small but dedicated and skilful staff.

Congratulations to Tess Benson for being awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship which allowed her a two month study of farmed fish production in North and South America. Tess is an expert on this subject but the Fellowship allowed further development of knowledge and work on fish welfare. The first of a series of Welfare Update Courses has just been completed which was successful and well attended. The HSA is also providing Continuing Professional Development training for Official Veterinary Surgeons, an important initiative.

Much of what I have highlighted is activity of an educational nature. However the HSA's activities are much broader than this and include the support of research which improves the knowledge upon which advice and educational activities are based. An example of this is the research to improve the electrical stun/kill device for cattle outlined in this newsletter.

This newsletter describes not only what I have mentioned but other current and recent activities of the HSA and makes very interesting reading.



Peter Biggs
Chairman

Success in Turkey

Since 1997 the HSA has carried out a number of projects in Turkey in conjunction with the University of Bristol and the Chamber of Veterinary Surgeons of Istanbul. Early projects included electrical stunning equipment demonstrations given to veterinary surgeons, students and religious leaders at Istanbul University. Equipment was donated to an abattoir and the staff trained in its correct use and maintenance. Most recently, research was carried out into the effect of pre-slaughter stunning on bleed-out rates and this work has just been published in the UFAW Journal *Animal Welfare* 2004, 13: 387–392. Last year the Turkish parliament passed new legislation on animal welfare which has just come into effect and had an impact on this year's religious festival of Bayram (Eid) when religious slaughter takes place on a large scale. For the first time, no one was allowed to slaughter animals without the proper authority and licence and fines were imposed on offenders. We believe that the publicity given to our work, assisted by Dr Tahsin Yesildere, made a significant contribution to this change in legislation.

New Orleans

In January 2005, HSA Technical Officer Tess Benson was invited to speak at the Aquaculture America conference in New Orleans. This was the first time that fish welfare had featured on the conference agenda and a whole day was dedicated to this rapidly emerging area. The HSA presentation covered the current industry practices for humane slaughter of farmed fish in the UK and the leading developments that the industry has made in the past three years.

Fish Guidance Notes

The production of the HSA's fish guidance notes is now set for publication in early 2005. The publication had been delayed due to new information relating to the electrical stunning of small fish. Researchers are still refining the method of humane electrical stunning and killing of trout and have now gained a better insight into how the process works. The guidance notes now include these developments as well as the points raised during the recent study tour Technical Officer Tess Benson made to North and South America.

National Fallen Stock Scheme

On 22 November, after a postponement of over six months, the national fallen stock collection scheme finally left the starting blocks. In just three weeks more than 23,000 livestock producers had signed up to it along with 150 collectors registered throughout the country. The chairman of the National Fallen Stock Company (NFSCo) was said to be very pleased and encouraged by this figure, as the aim was to sign up 40,000 producers in the first year. The scheme has not been without its teething problems, though: five collectors have dropped out of the scheme since it started, which has given rise to difficulties for farmers in the Cheshire area.

The HSA and NFSCo are currently discussing the provision of training in stunning and slaughter for all approved collectors.

New OVS training course

The HSA is providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training for Eville & Jones (E&J), the UK's largest veterinary meat hygiene staff agency. HSA technical staff have so far delivered two in-depth refresher courses, based on the successful HSA video *Humane Slaughter – Taking Responsibility*, to approximately forty Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVSs). These courses detail the welfare considerations which need to be taken into account from the animal's arrival at the abattoir up to the point of its death. The day finishes with delegates solving practical case studies and presenting their findings for further discussion. Feedback from these first two courses has been very positive and there are now discussions about the possibility of the HSA providing a similar course exclusively on poultry welfare at slaughter. The HSA's Technical Director Charlie Mason was also asked as a guest speaker to the Eville & Jones national CPD day in mid-January, when all 160+ E&J OVSs were present for an afternoon seminar.

Captive-bolt training

In November the HSA's Technical Director travelled to Belfast, at the invitation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Northern Ireland (DARDNI) to provide captive-bolt training for government employees. The courses were delivered over two days to delegates made up of State Veterinary Service (SVS) veterinary officers and support staff. Classroom-style training covering the safe use and maintenance of captive-bolt equipment was followed by hands-on weapon handling and practice at discharging captive-bolt instruments into cattle, sheep and pig heads.

Royal Smithfield Show 2004

The HSA exhibition stand was again a prominent feature near the cattle lines at the 2004 Royal Smithfield Show, held at the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre from 2–5 December 2004.

The HSA stand attracted a large number of visitors, with religious slaughter, emergency killing, the new European transport regulation and the lack of local slaughter facilities being the main subjects of discussion.

Winston Churchill Trust

This year HSA Technical Officer Tess Benson was awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to carry out a two month study of farmed fish production in North and South America. Her studies focused on the slaughter and handling techniques used, the reasons why they are used and the attitudes within these countries towards fish welfare.

The countries visited included Canada, the USA, Mexico and Chile. As expected, a wide variety of slaughter methods was observed during the trip and talks were held with various industry organisations to discuss the implications, advantages and disadvantages of such methods. A more detailed report will be featured in the 2004/05 HSA Annual Report.

We congratulate Tess on winning this award which provided her with a valuable opportunity to further develop the HSA's work on fish welfare.

The HSA plans to use this information to help develop the forthcoming Best Practice Guidelines on fish slaughter

EFSA review of the systems used for stunning and killing food animals

At the request of the European Commission, the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare of the European Food Standard Agency (EFSA) recently undertook a review of the systems used for stunning and killing the main commercial livestock species. The Panel's report (available at www.efsa.eu.int/science/ahaw/ahaw_opinions/catindex_en.html) was published in June 2004. A considerable number of research priorities for the future are identified including: the development of humane gas mixtures and systems for pigs; further investigation to determine more humane gas mixtures for poultry; and the development of humane slaughter methods for the remaining species of farmed fish for which no commercially acceptable methods currently exist. The report is likely to be of interest and relevance to all HSA members involved with livestock killing and slaughter and especially to those involved with directing research and technological developments in these fields.

Research to improve electrical stun/kill device for cattle

The majority of cattle in the UK are stunned by captive-bolt prior to slaughter; however, larger plants are moving towards electrical stun/kill systems. This equipment immediately induces a cardiac arrest after electrical stunning, so that rapid death of animals is not dependent on the effectiveness of the stick (the procedure used to drain the animal of blood). This reduces the chance of operator error.

The HSA funded a recent project to address concerns that this device may not be consistently inducing cardiac arrest. This was undertaken by Alison Weaver, an MSc student at Bristol University, under the supervision of Mr Steve Wotton and Dr Leisha Hewitt.

The results were reassuring in that the incidence of cardiac arrest was found to be 100% for the two systems tested. However, a proportion of animals in both groups (there were no significant differences between them) showed signs of rhythmic breathing, the common assessment for consciousness. These signs make simple evaluation of stun efficacy difficult under routine circumstances.

The study concludes that methods need to be developed to rapidly confirm cardiac dysfunction; this would consistently ensure that the welfare of each animal is fully protected.



Photo courtesy of Bristol University

Dorothy Sidley project 2003

The results have recently been published of the 2003 Dorothy Sidley student project by Russell Parker and others of the University of Bristol Veterinary School, on the effect of blindfolding horses during handling and loading onto transport vehicles. Blindfolding is often used to aid the handling of horses that are difficult to control. In this study the effects of blinkering and blindfolding on behaviour and heart rates of 15 horses were investigated when the animals were stabled, being led and being loaded. The heart rate was found to increase in all three of these situations when blindfolds were used and it was concluded that, in general, blindfolding tended to make the horses more nervous and difficult

to handle. However, these were relatively well-behaved horses and the study did not discount the practical application that blindfolding may have for improving welfare and safety when handling more flighty animals.

Exhibitions

2004 was a busy year for the HSA in terms of exhibitions. In addition to the major technical exhibitions such as Foodex Meatex, the Pig and Poultry Fair and Royal Smithfield, the HSA attended more specialist events including Sheep 2004, the Rare Breeds Show and the Beef Event. These provided a good opportunity to promote the work of the HSA to a wider audience and to advise farmers and producers on market, transport and slaughter issues.

HSA Turkey Guidelines

In December 2004 the HSA received comments back on its consultation about the newest addition to the Best Practice Guidelines series. *Best Practice Guidelines for the Welfare of Turkeys in Processing Plants* will be the fifth in the series which already includes guidelines for sheep and goats, cattle, pigs and broilers and hens. The aim of this series is to provide a set of best practice standards that will be of use to all those involved in developing and running assurance schemes and abattoir policies. Industry comment was sought on all four guidelines and, where appropriate, comments received have been included in this document also.

The final draft of the turkey guidelines is planned to be completed and printed by the end of March 2005. The cost per booklet is £10 but discounts are available when any three or more booklets from the series are purchased.

Diary dates

May	25	Welsh Sheep 2005, Merthyr Cynog, Brecon
June	8	Beef Expo, Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells
Sep	2-4	AMI Conference, Harper Adams College, Shrops.
Oct	11	HSA General Meeting, Wheathampstead

Further dates awaiting confirmation will be available on the HSA website