

HSA to run international training workshop

In pursuit of its aims to promote high standards of livestock welfare around the world, the HSA is very pleased to have been awarded a contract with the European Commission. This contract is to run a major international training workshop on welfare standards concerning the stunning and killing of animals in slaughterhouses and in disease control situations. We are planning to run this event, for delegates from many European states and other countries, from 27–29 September 2006.

The subjects covered in the workshop will include: legislation; the scientific basis of humane handling, stunning, slaughter and killing methods; best practice for monitoring and enforcement of welfare legislation, and auditing and reporting methods for monitoring and evaluation of animal welfare at slaughter or killing. The workshop will extend over three days and will include study visits to modern abattoirs and processing plants in the UK.



For further information please contact the HSA (email: workshop@hsa.org.uk telephone: +44 (0) 1582 831919 fax: +44 (0) 1582 831414).

International Welfare Forum in China

James Kirkwood and Charles Mason were invited speakers at the International Forum on Animal Welfare and Meat Safety held in Beijing from 3 to 5 November 2005.

This event, organised by CIWF and the RSPCA International Branch, to whom we are very grateful, brought together many different groups. These included representatives from the animal production industry, Chinese animal welfare groups, welfare scientists and other interested parties from several different countries. It was an excellent opportunity for sharing views on animal welfare and for exploring ways to develop mutual interests in the subject. The Chinese animal production industry is vast and is developing rapidly.

The HSA is keen to promote high standards of livestock welfare around the world and is always looking for opportunities to work together with colleagues in other countries in pursuit of global advances. We are most grateful also to our Chinese hosts for their great kindness and hospitality.

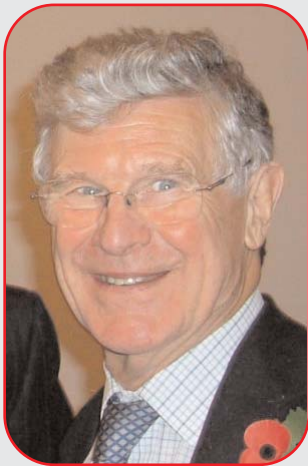


James Kirkwood speaking at the International Forum on Animal Welfare and Meat Safety

Chairman's comment

The HSA has very few staff, but one only has to read the newsletter to see how extraordinarily active they are. You will note from the report that the HSA has been successful in a bid to run an international training workshop which indicates the respect and influence the Association has not only in this country but around the world. This is also confirmed by the invitation to James Kirkwood and Charles Mason to speak at the International Forum on Animal Welfare and Meat Safety held in Beijing, China.

The fact that the second Welfare at Slaughter Update course is over subscribed indicates how important this initiative is and also the influence of the HSA has on welfare and good practice.



Peter Biggs
Chairman

HSA Welfare Update Course

The HSA's successful Welfare at Slaughter Update courses are due to take place on 28 February – 2 March. The courses proved to be as popular as last year and both the red and white meat days are over-subscribed.

The aim of both days is 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.

A number of relevant topics are being covered on each day, including new research methods available for on-farm slaughter of poultry for disease control, practical solutions to heat stress in poultry, updates on Defra-funded welfare research and welfare implications of the new meat hygiene regulations.

New meat hygiene legislation

New EU food hygiene regulations, known as H1, H2 and H3, came into force in the UK on 1 January 2006.

The implications for animal welfare are mixed. Firstly the regulations controlling on-farm emergency slaughter have been slightly tightened. However, a requirement for the oesophagus and trachea not to be severed at bleeding has raised concern that some sheep slaughterers will change to cutting only one carotid artery. The HSA recommends that sheep should be slaughtered by a thoracic stick, which will both comply with the new requirements and improve welfare at slaughter.

New fish research

Having worked on some of the more commonly farmed fish species, the HSA is now embarking on work involving a new species, Halibut.

This feasibility study aims to look at the options for developing a commercial method of humanely slaughtering halibut.

The two-year project, funded by Defra, will investigate and identify the problems associated with the current methods used to kill halibut and how these methods can be improved.

The ultimate aim of the study is to design a working prototype of a suitable slaughter method, with a view to possibly developing a commercial model at a later date.

HSA Poultry Catching Award

This year the HSA has initiated a new award to help promote the welfare of poultry species during catching for slaughter. Moving poultry from the farm to the processing plant for slaughter involves all birds being caught and loaded into containers before being transported.

The award will be given to the poultry plant or independent catching team which is judged to have made the greatest improvement to animal welfare in one of the following ways: best catching training programme; best catching protocol; or best innovative equipment/system to improve catching of one or more poultry species.

The award includes a plaque and £1000 towards further initiatives to improve bird welfare during catching and handling for slaughter.

Group stunning of sheep

In September 2005 the HSA commenced a Defra-funded project with ADAS to review abattoir group-stunning practices. Group-stunning of sheep, goats, pigs and calves is a common method in small- to medium-sized abattoirs. However, as highlighted in the 2003 Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) *Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing*, there is no legislative guidance relating to the design, construction or use of pens for group-stunning situations; neither is there any advice about stocking densities within the system.

The aim of this project is to review current practice and determine the optimum design and operational criteria to maintain high standards of welfare for the animals being stunned in such systems.

So far 30 abattoirs across the UK have been visited, with a further ten remaining. Following all the visits the information will be collated and an industry meeting held to determine possible solutions. The most appropriate ideas will then be developed for commercial use.

Denmark study tour

At the end of September the HSA's Technical Director joined other members of the Worshipful Company of Butchers in Copenhagen for a three-day study tour of the Danish meat industry.

The tour started with background information on the evolution and structure of the Danish meat industry, which is based on pork and bacon. This was followed by a visit to a large, modern pork processing factory.

Day two saw visits to a working abattoir and cutting plant used specifically for training meat plant operatives, and a tour around a traditional Danish butcher's shop which makes all its own meat products on-site.

The final day was at the Danish Meat Training College and Danish Meat Research Institute. A number of presentations were given, including an insight into the latest carbon dioxide stunning and killing technology, emergency killing and the new European transport regulation.

Market Development Grant

Last year's newsletter reported that the 2004 Livestock Market Welfare Development Grant had been awarded to Selby Market in North Yorkshire.

Those keen-eyed readers of the HSA annual report will have noted that it was, in fact, awarded to Exeter Market in early August 2005. This inconsistency came about because the operators of Selby Market were unable to meet the conditions of the grant in the given time. Exeter Market's proposal had been considered by the judges to be a very close second to Selby's and the grant was therefore passed on to Exeter when Selby withdrew its application during the early part of last year.

The HSA is currently reviewing the Livestock Market Welfare Development Grant with a view to widening its appeal and encouraging more applications in this important area. Details of any changes to the award will be included in the 2005–2006 Annual Report.

Welfare assessment of animals moving through markets

As mentioned in the latest Annual Report, the HSA is pleased to be part of a Defra-funded project with the Royal Veterinary College to review the welfare of animals moving through livestock markets.

As animals are moved, and often mixed, it can be expected that they undergo a small amount of stress. This review involves visiting 24 markets across England and Wales with the aim of identifying good practice and good facilities. The results can then be used to set guidelines and help raise the level of welfare across the entire industry, where needed. Markets have been chosen with the aim of representing a cross-section of throughputs, location and farm animal species passing through the marketing system.





Eurogroup for animal welfare

In August last year HSA's Technical Director, Charlie Mason, was invited to join the Eurogroup Working Group on Slaughter and Killing. Eurogroup represents animal welfare organisations from all over the EU and strives to ensure that animal welfare is taken into account in all relevant EU policy areas and that European Laws designed to protect animals are adopted and enforced.

The Working Group on Slaughter and Killing met for the first time in October 2005 and will meet again at the end

of April this year. The group comprises representatives from Eurogroup for Animal Welfare, HSA, RSPCA, and other animal welfare groups from Holland, Germany and Denmark. Its purpose is to prepare a final draft of the Eurogroup position on the slaughter and killing of farm animals and related issues. It will also state where it is believed research is needed. Once adopted, the position will be reviewed on an annual basis, in the light of any new findings.

The group was set up in the context of the anticipated review of the EU Council Directive 119/93 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. The document should equip Eurogroup to constructively engage in the review process, including on any 'new' issues the working group feels should be considered.

Market Managers' Degree

HSA Technical Officer, Tess Benson, presented at the first Market Managers' Foundation Degree course in November 2005.

The degree, which has the backing of the Livestock Auctioneers' Association and the Scottish Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers, has been set up to provide formal education to market managers, many of whom may already have many years of practical experience or may just be entering the industry.

Previously there has only been a formal qualification for managers in Scotland or for general market staff in England and Wales in the format of an NVQ.

This new course is run by the University of Central

Lancashire, which has also been responsible for delivering a large proportion of the drover NVQs. In addition to university staff, the course involves a number of external speakers, as well as the HSA, who presented on various specific issues within the livestock market.

The HSA welcomes this new course and hopes that it will be able to make a valuable contribution to education and training about livestock welfare. We wish the organisers every success with the initiative.

Exhibitions

The HSA will again be attending some major exhibitions during 2006 including The Pig and Poultry Fair and the Royal Smithfield Show.

These shows provide excellent opportunities to promote the work of the HSA and the advice, information and services available. This year the new welfare training DVD on best practice for the catching, handling, transport and slaughter of poultry will be a featured highlight at the shows.

Diary dates

March	19–22	Foodex Meatex 2006, Birmingham NEC
May	9–10	Pig and Poultry Fair, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire
August	2	NSA Sheep 2006, Three Counties Showground, Malvern
Oct	10	HSA Annual General Meeting, Wheathampstead
Nov/Dec	30–2	Royal Smithfield Show, Earls Court, London

Further dates awaiting confirmation will be available on the HSA website