

## THE FACTS

### Introduction

Many animals killed to provide meat for the Jewish and Muslim communities in the UK are slaughtered in a way that complies with certain religious beliefs. This is known as religious slaughter and legally may only be carried out in licensed slaughterhouses by authorised slaughtermen of the Jewish or Islamic faiths.

Under EU legislation (Council Directive 119/93/EC of 22 December 1993) all animals must be stunned before being slaughtered. However, the legislation provides for this requirement to be waived in the case of religious slaughter. The EU Directive is implemented in the UK by the 'Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995' (as amended) (WASK 95), and special provisions are made for the slaughter of animals by religious methods.

The legislation allows religious slaughter to be carried out in licensed slaughterhouses without prior stunning, (but only if unnecessary suffering is prevented), by:

- the Jewish method for the food of Jews by a Jew who holds an official slaughterman's licence (issued by the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS)) and who is duly licensed –
  - (i) in England and Wales by the Rabbinical Commission for the licensing of Shochetim; or
  - (ii) in Scotland by the Chief Rabbi; and
- the Muslim method for the food of Muslims by a Muslim who holds an official slaughterman's licence (issued by the MHS).

The Old School, Brewhouse Hill,  
Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1582 831919

Fax: +44 (0)1582 831414

E-mail: [info@hsa.org.uk](mailto:info@hsa.org.uk)

Website: [www.hsa.org.uk](http://www.hsa.org.uk)

Registered Charity No: 209563



All meat intended for sale must be inspected and declared fit for human consumption by a representative of the MHS.

Cattle to be slaughtered by a religious method must be held in a restraining pen in an upright position. The restraining pen must be approved by the Secretary of State and be of such a design, size, and be able to be operated in such a way, as to protect the animal from any avoidable pain, suffering or agitation when entering or while confined in the pen. In particular the pen must contain an effective means of restraining the animal, including a head restraint, and a means of support that will take the weight of the animal during, and following, slaughter.

When an animal is slaughtered without prior stunning it cannot be moved until it is unconscious from loss of blood. Sheep and goats cannot be moved for at least 20 seconds; and cattle for at least 30 seconds.

### **Shechita – Jewish method of slaughter**

The Board of Shechita controls the Jewish method of slaughter. Jewish slaughtermen (Shochetim) undergo special training and are subject to licensing and annual examination by the Rabbinical Commission in England and Wales (the Chief Rabbi in Scotland). The Shochetim must also hold an official slaughterman's licence issued by the MHS.

Jewish religious law demands that animals must be alive, healthy and have suffered no injury at the time of slaughter. One reason why the Jewish authorities are opposed to the stunning of animals before slaughter is the belief that commonly used stunning methods cause injury. Captive-bolt stunning does cause an injury as it penetrates the skull, but it is argued that electrical stunning also causes injury. In the shechita method a single rapid, uninterrupted movement of the knife must sever both carotid arteries and both jugular veins. The knife must be of a sufficient size and sharpness to accomplish this, and the blade must be undamaged. Jewish authorities argue that because of the sharpness of the knife the animal does not feel any pain from the cut, and because of the rapid loss of blood they believe it is insensible within three seconds of the cut being made. All the blood must be drained from the animal as Jewish religious law forbids the eating of

### **What does the HSA do?**

The Humane Slaughter Association is the only registered charity which specialises in the welfare of livestock in markets, during transport and at slaughter. It achieves its aims by arranging practical training sessions, by publishing educational materials, by funding research projects and by providing constructive advice and information. This rational approach continues to achieve significant improvements to food animal welfare.

### **How can you help?**

HSA depends upon voluntary subscriptions, donations and legacies for its income. Support is needed from both individuals and corporate groups so that the Association may continue to play an effective role in the welfare of food animals.

The annual subscription for individual members is £15, for societies and corporate groups £20 or £30 and for those in full-time education £5.

did not make labelling compulsory. They stated that they would consider if this could be addressed through a voluntary system of labelling, but the chances of a voluntary system being adopted do not appear to be high.

### **HSA's view**

Whilst respecting differing religious beliefs, the HSA's position on the pre-slaughter stunning of animals has always been unequivocal, all animals should be effectively stunned prior to being bled. Recent advances in the electrical stunning of cattle now make reversible stunning a practical option for all. This overcomes one of the main obstacles preventing a full uptake of pre-slaughter stunning.

As long as meat from animals slaughtered without pre-stunning is available in the UK (whether slaughtered in the UK or imported), we believe it should be clearly and accurately labelled as such.

**The aim of the HSA remains that all animals should be effectively stunned prior to being bled, because this precludes the possibility of suffering.**

### **References**

(1) **Anil MH, Yesildere T, Aksu H, Matur E, McKinstry JL, Erdogan O, Hughes SI and Mason C** 2004 Comparison of religious slaughter of sheep with methods that include pre-slaughter stunning, and the lack of differences in exsanguinations, packed cell volume and meat quality parameters. *Animal Welfare* 13: 387-392

(2) **Anil MH, Yesildere T, Aksu H, Matur E, McKinstry JL, Weaver HR, Erdogan O, Hughes SI and Mason C** 2006 Comparison of Halal slaughter with captive bolt stunning and neck cutting in cattle: exsanguination and quality parameters. *Animal Welfare* 15: 325-330

blood, and it is claimed that far less blood drains from the carcass of an animal that has been stunned than from one that has been slaughtered without stunning\*.

Meat fit for consumption by Jews is called kosher; unfit meat is called trefah. A carcass rejected by the religious authority as trefah may be passed as fit for human consumption by the MHS, and sold into the general meat market. In addition, Jews may only eat the hindquarters of cattle if certain blood vessels have been removed. This is known as porging. In the past this procedure was carried out in the UK and the rear quarters sold as kosher meat. However, this was stopped in the 1930s by the religious authorities and as a result the discarded hindquarters are now sold into the general meat market.

### **Halal – Muslim method of slaughter**

Halal slaughter must be carried out by Muslims who hold an official slaughterman's licence but, unlike Jewish slaughtermen, they are not licensed by a religious authority. The Koran requires that for meat to be halal the animal must be alive at the time of slaughter, that God's name is invoked at the time the cut is made and that the blood is thoroughly drained from the carcass after slaughter. The knife used to make the cut must be undamaged and be of sufficient size and sharpness to ensure that each animal is slaughtered by a single rapid uninterrupted movement of the knife, resulting in the severance of both carotid arteries and both jugular veins.

There are differing views within the Muslim community with regard to stunning, and particularly head-only electrical stunning. This is where electrodes are placed on either side of the animal's head so that they span the brain, and an electric current of sufficient strength and duration is passed through the brain of the animal to immedi

*\* Research indicates that it can take far longer than three seconds for the animal to lose consciousness. Research also indicates that there is no significant difference in total blood loss between animals which are slaughtered without stunning, and those that are stunned before slaughter (1), (2)*

ately render it unconscious. Some Muslim religious authorities accept that the stunned animal is still alive and will recover consciousness if no further action is taken. That being the case, they are content that the meat from an animal electrically stunned before slaughter is halal provided all the other religious requirements are met. Others argue that stunning results in the animal feeling pain, that more blood is retained within the carcass and that stunning results in chemical changes in the meat which makes it unhealthy to eat. To these religious authorities the meat from an animal that has been stunned prior to slaughter is, therefore, haram (unacceptable). They also argue that the rapid loss of blood following religious slaughter results in the animal becoming unconscious before it can feel any pain.

### **Discussion**

The Jewish and Islamic religions emphasise the importance of the humane treatment of animals, and both faiths recognise that taking the life of an animal carries great responsibility. The religious method was developed many centuries ago, motivated by respect for animals and a desire to slaughter them as humanely as possible. However, although it has been argued by some supporters of the religious methods that these methods cause no pain because of the sharpness of the knife used, there is a considerable body of scientific evidence that this is not the case. The HSA believes that, with the development of new technology, these principles can now be best ensured by pre-slaughter stunning and, therefore, all food animals should be stunned prior to slaughter in order to preclude any risk of suffering.

Following the development of humane mechanical stunning equipment in the 1920s, the HSA campaigned strongly for humane stunning to be a legal requirement in the slaughter of farm animals. However, in 1933 when the first law regarding slaughter came into force it included specific exemptions from stunning for animals slaughtered by the Jewish or Muslim methods of slaughter.

The Association campaigned again in support of two Private Members' Bills in 1956 and 1968, and Lord Somers' Bill in the House

of Lords, which sought to remove these exemptions. These Bills were all defeated and the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 continued to allow religious slaughter without stunning.

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), the Government's independent advisory body on animal welfare, published its report on the welfare of animals slaughtered by religious methods in 1985, in which it was recommended that religious slaughter without prior stunning should be phased out. The HSA strongly supported this recommendation along with the recommendation that all carcasses and cuts of meat prepared from animals slaughtered by religious methods without stunning, and offered for sale to the general public, should be clearly labelled as to the method of slaughter employed. The Government at that time accepted neither of these recommendations.

In 2003 FAWC published a new report on the welfare of animals at slaughter or killing, (*Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing. Part 1: Red Meat Animals*). This report again recommended to Government that the exemption from the requirement for a pre-cut stun for religious slaughter should be repealed. FAWC also recommended that until the exemption was repealed, all animals slaughtered without a pre-cut stun should receive a post-cut stun. Additionally FAWC reiterated its recommendation from 1985 that until the exemption for religious slaughter was repealed all carcasses and cuts of meat prepared from animals slaughtered by religious methods, and offered for sale to the general public, should be clearly labelled as to the method of slaughter employed. Finally it was recommended that where an animal had not been stunned nothing should be inserted into the neck wound post-cut. The HSA supported these recommendations.

However, the Government in its 2005 response to the FAWC report again rejected these recommendations on the grounds that it was committed to respect the rights of religious groups. On the issue of labelling meat from animals slaughtered by a religious method, the Government conceded that members of the general public may not wish to eat meat from animals slaughtered without prior stunning, but