

Mobile Slaughter Units - A Concept Note

SUMMARY

The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) has been interested in the concept of a mobile slaughter unit (MSU) for many years. The idea of taking the abattoir to the animals rather than vice versa is attractive because, if it could be done, it would offer a way to avoid the potential stresses of transport. It is this potential animal welfare benefit that interests the HSA, but the idea may have other attractions to the farmer also, in providing a greater degree of personal control of stock right through to the point of slaughter, and the potential for marketing a premium product as a result.

Recent Years

The HSA has been involved in three attempts to put into practice the idea of an MSU for sheep, pigs and cattle in the UK in recent years. During the mid 1990s the HSA provided technical advice in the development and establishment of an MSU in the Brecon Beacons Country Park and also provided substantial financial support for the development of an MSU in Herefordshire. The experiences gained with these pilots indicated that it is technically feasible to run such units based on one farm but, as far as we are aware, the concept has not yet been developed on a commercial scale. The Brecon Beacons MSU is no longer in operation there, and the MSU in Herefordshire was destroyed by a fire several years ago.

During 2000 the HSA assisted a group of interested farmers to establish a company – Humane Slaughter Services Ltd (HSS Ltd) – with the specific objective of commissioning a thorough assessment of the potential commercial feasibility of an MSU scheme. This study, which was also part-funded by MAFF and the HSA, was undertaken on behalf of HSS Ltd by a team from the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC).

The Future

The feasibility study indicated that it may be possible for an MSU to process sufficient stock for economic viability but, to do so, it would need to be ran at high capacity (double-shifts). It would also need to be moved between about 6-8 base-stations, each of which would act as a base for collection of stock brought from other farms in the area, to ensure sufficient headage. One difficulty that would need to be overcome, therefore, is that of organising the logistics of the operation with a large co-operative network of farms centred around each of the base stations, particularly in view of peaks and troughs in seasonal demand. Because (in order to provide sufficient throughput) animals would have to be transported to the base-stations, the MSU would not, unfortunately, offer a way to avoid animal transport completely.





Costs

Another difficulty is that it was estimated that capital costs would be high. The mobile unit itself would be likely to cost about £700k and each base-station would be likely to cost about £75k on average. The total cost of establishing an MSU with its 6-8 base-stations would be likely to be around £1.3 million and it would be difficult, therefore, to launch such a scheme without some substantial grant aid.

For these reasons, as far as we are aware, the MSU concept has not been taken up commercially in the UK to date.

What does the Humane Slaughter Association 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?

The HSA depends entirely on voluntary subscriptions and donations. The annual subscriptions are as follows;

individual members is £15,

societies and corporate groups £20 or £30 (for £20 you will receive notification of all publications published, for £30 you will receive a copy of the publications),

those in full-time education £5.

Further details may be obtained from the HSA Secretary.

The Humane Slaughter Association

The Old School

Brewhouse Hill

Wheathampstead

Herts, AL4 8AN

Tel: +44 (0)1582 831919 Fax: +44 (0)1582 831414

Email: info@hsa.org.uk,

Website: www.hsa.org.uk



Registered Charity No. 209563