



Humane Slaughter Association
Newsletter March 2009

Chairman's comment

As the new Chair of the HSA's Trustees, I am very pleased to introduce this Spring Newsletter.

Over the years, the HSA has played an instrumental role in promoting a great many improvements in food animal welfare and the charity continues to be active over a diverse range of projects. You will note that increasingly our involvement extends beyond our shores.

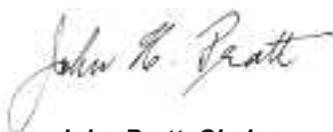
The new Humane Slaughter Award has been introduced to recognise and promote advances in humane slaughter and we look forward to the announcement of the winner of the inaugural award in due course.

The HSA's education and training services are now featured in a new brochure and I would encourage everyone with an involvement or interest in livestock handling and welfare to obtain a free copy. Training continues to be provided to a wide range of people from smallholders and processing plants to veterinarians and other specialist bodies, both in the UK and overseas.

Substantial work continues in the welfare of poultry with collaboration in two major projects addressing the welfare of poultry on shackle lines, and the development of more effective, head-only, stunning.

The new EC Regulation on the protection of animals at slaughter and killing contains, amongst other things, proposals for a national reference centre in each member state, to undertake various tasks important to welfare. The HSA will be investigating its possible role in such a centre in the UK and we look forward to the outcome with much interest.

I thank you for all your interest in and support of the charity's work.



John Pratt, Chairman

Proposed European Council Regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing

During 2008 the European Commission published its proposals for a new Council Regulation (directly applicable to all Member States) to update the existing European legislation (Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter and killing) that was put in place fifteen years ago. The legislation needs revision and the HSA has been following the process and feeding into it.

One of the proposals is that each Member State shall appoint a national reference centre to undertake various tasks including: provision of technical expertise relating to the approval of slaughterhouses, carry out assessments of new stunning methods, actively encourage development of codes of good practice, and accredit bodies for the issuance of certificates of competence. If agreed, such centres would clearly play a major role in the operation of the Regulation and the HSA is aiming to organise a workshop to discuss what might be involved in establishing such a centre for the UK and what form it might take.

New award to recognise significant advances in humane slaughter

Very large numbers of farmed livestock are slaughtered daily around the world to provide food and other resources for human benefit. It is important that slaughter methods are as humane as possible. During the last 100 years or so, great advances have been made in this field and work continues in pursuit of further improvements.

To encourage and give recognition to important contributions made in this field, the HSA has launched a new award scheme for individuals or organisations (anywhere in the world) whose work has resulted in significant advances in the humane slaughter of farmed livestock.

This new scheme was advertised in December 2008 with a 31 March 2009 deadline for applications. We hope to receive a good crop of applications and to be able to announce a winner later in the year. This year's Spring Appeal is to support the new Award and your help will be much appreciated.





photo courtesy Bluemoondog Pictures

Welfare of poultry on shackle lines

The most common method of stunning poultry in the UK is by electrical waterbath. As part of this stunning procedure, birds are inverted and suspended upside down by the legs so that they enter the water head first. Previous research has shown that poultry find shackling aversive and an alternative would be ideal.

Work is nearing an end on a Defra-funded research project which aims to reduce stress and discomfort on the shackle line with a breast support system. It is envisaged that companies will be able to modify their existing shackle lines without too much difficulty and improve poultry welfare during this process.



Head-only stunning of poultry using electrical waterbaths

A new project for the HSA has begun in earnest with a visit to The Netherlands to observe a novel method of assessing stunning in poultry. This method may be incorporated into the project as a way of monitoring the effectiveness of head-only stunning of poultry using an electrical waterbath.

Head-only stunning in electrical waterbaths differs to current industry practice where the electric current is passed through the whole body of the bird. However whole-body application of current may cause damage to the meat and this puts pressure on companies to reduce downgrading. Head-only stunning in electrical waterbaths may therefore provide a solution to this problem by avoiding negative effects on meat quality while targeting the brain for an effective stun.



Out and about – visits to equipment manufacturers, farms and processing plants

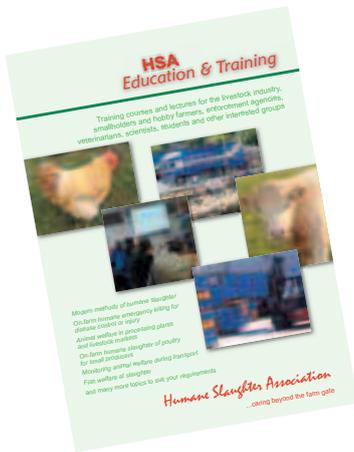
The HSA has been invited to visit a number of processing facilities this year, including Tulip Limited in Westerleigh, Moy Park Limited in Anwick and two trout farms in Yorkshire. The HSA has also visited two smallholders to observe their seasonal slaughter of geese and turkeys for the Christmas market. In addition to this, the HSA has been in contact with Anglia Autoflow Limited, to keep up to date with developments in the manufacturing of poultry harvesting and killing equipment.

HSA staff news

In December 2008 the HSA welcomed a new Technical Officer, Elizabeth Bilbe, to the staff.

Elizabeth has a keen interest in agriculture and animal welfare having grown up in the countryside and worked on a dairy farm, at a wildlife hospital and in a veterinary practice in school holidays and as a student. She has a BSc in Animal Science from the University of Edinburgh and an MSc in Meat Science from the University of Bristol, where she also completed Animal and Poultry Welfare Officer training. Prior to joining the HSA, Elizabeth worked at the Scottish Agricultural College.

Dr Ambrose Tinarwo has taken up a teaching post at Moulton College in Northampton. We thank Ambrose for all his valuable contributions while at the HSA and wish him the very best in his new work.



HSA Education & Training

The HSA's new brochure promoting its training activities has now been produced. It explains to the reader the variety of training courses the HSA can provide; everything from lectures for students and talks for local groups interested in animal welfare, through to practical training courses for abattoir staff and smallholders. If you would like to receive information on HSA training courses and lectures, please contact the HSA office.

Charles Mason, HSA Technical Director, has successfully completed a programme of firearms refresher courses for Animal Health (formerly State Veterinary Service). These courses were held at Worcester and consolidated the initial two-day firearms courses carried out during 2007 and early 2008. Over 70 Animal Health veterinary field staff have now attended both courses and a new programme of primary and refresher courses for new trainees will be held later this year, with the HSA again being the leading training provider.

In collaboration with FCCA, an independent company specialising in food chain consultancy and auditing, the HSA carried out a joint training session in animal welfare at a major lamb processing plant in the south west in early October. The training was tailored for a number of shop-floor and security staff who are, or who may be, directly involved with the live animal side of the operation. The course covered all aspects of unloading, handling, penning, stunning and slaughter of sheep. In addition, special attention was given to identifying sick or injured animals and implementing the correct procedures to deal with them. More such courses, covering all the major farmed species including poultry and fish, are planned for later this year.

Poultry welfare training for processing plants

Following on from the training program for staff from Bernard Matthews Farms in October 2007, the HSA provided training for other members of staff from the same company in November 2008. Thirteen employees from two sites attended the two-day course, day two of which was held at Easton College, Norwich.

Leading duck processor Cherry Valley Farms Limited requested the HSA provide poultry welfare training for a number of their employees in November 2008. The training program covered duck welfare during catching, transport and slaughter and was well received by the participants.

Training for smallholders

In September and October 2008 respectively, the HSA visited Plumpton College at the Netherfield Centre in East Sussex and the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester. The purpose of the visits was to provide training in how to humanely slaughter poultry using electrical and mechanical stunners. Each course was fully booked and participants ranged from students, to those who keep a few hens in the back garden, through to commercial smallholders who sell their birds at the farm gate. All participants on the courses were successfully certified as competent by the veterinarians from Animal Health and were able to collect their registered slaughter licences.

The HSA has been asked to provide training at these two colleges again in the spring of 2009. If you are interested in attending an HSA training course please contact info@hsa.org.uk or 01582 831919.



Overseas

In November 2008 Charles Mason, HSA Technical Director, travelled to New Zealand and journeyed the length of the country from Auckland to Queenstown, via Hamilton, Taupo, Hawke's Bay, Wellington, Christchurch, Twizel, Dunedin, and Te Anau. During the trip he attended the Commonwealth Agricultural Conference in Christchurch, visited a number of livestock farms, breeding projects and processing plants, and carried out some welfare-at-slaughter audits on behalf of one of the UK's major retailers.

Agriculture accounts for a large proportion of New Zealand's gross domestic product. Milk and lamb are its largest exports, with 97% of its milk being exported in powder form to South East Asia. The demand for wool has fallen in recent years and consequently the number of sheep being farmed is significantly less than ten years ago. However, dairy farming is on the increase and areas such as the Canterbury Plains in the South Island, which used to be exclusively grazed by sheep, are now being increasingly used for herds of milking cows. There is also a significant export market for quality beef to Japan.

On his return from New Zealand the Technical Director travelled to Ireland to conduct a training programme for government veterinary surgeons. The training was in two parts – theoretical and practical – and took place near Cork. Eight Department of Agriculture Veterinary Officers were trained in the correct use and maintenance of captive-bolt and electrical stunning equipment in relation to killing pigs in emergency and disease control situations.

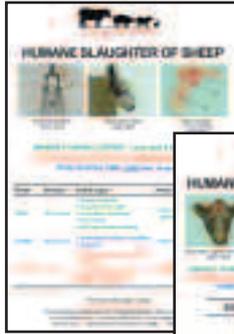
Electrical stunning of Arctic Charr in Sweden

Arctic charr are a salmonid fish species farmed in Sweden. Many are currently killed using carbon dioxide narcosis and there are serious concerns for fish welfare when using this method. In September 2008 the HSA and Silsoe Livestock Systems Limited travelled to the north of Sweden to ascertain what electrical parameters were required for the humane electrical stunning of Arctic charr, in an attempt to provide a humane alternative and improve the welfare of charr at slaughter. Trials were carried out in collaboration with the Swedish Life Sciences University and a set of electrical stun parameters were identified that could be used to achieve humane, high quality, high speed harvests at an acceptable price. A prototype stunning machine may be developed in Sweden to further test this approach.

Llama and sheep welfare in Bolivia

Georgina Limon Vega was awarded the Dorothy Sidley Memorial Award for 2008 and she recently submitted her report on the welfare of llamas and sheep at slaughter in Bolivia. The report highlights the need for education and funding so that the abattoirs in the area of study in Bolivia have access to higher welfare methods of slaughtering livestock. Speaking at the UFAW/HSA Vacation Scholars meeting at the University of Chester in December 2008, Georgina expressed how much she had enjoyed the project and her enthusiasm for continuing work in the same area, in her new job as a Research Associate at the Royal Veterinary College. We wish Georgina the best of luck in her new role and in promoting humane methods of slaughter in Bolivia.

photo courtesy Georgina Limon Vega



Production of posters providing guidance on key points for humane slaughter

One of the challenges for the HSA is how to make its advice on humane slaughter available and understandable to everyone involved in slaughter wherever they are in the world and whatever language they speak. To this end, we have been giving thought to trying to develop guidance that gets the key messages across using diagrams to avoid, or at least minimise, the need for translation. The HSA's Autumn Appeal 2008 was for support towards the production of such materials and we are pleased to report that, to pilot this idea, we have produced two posters providing key visual information on the slaughter of cattle and sheep. If feedback from the industry is positive we will aim to circulate these widely.



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