

companies. Electronic auctions have also been introduced allowing buyers to bid without visiting markets. Animals are classified and catalogued prior to sale and remain on the farm following the auction until collected by the buyer.

HSA's view

Every effort should be made to encourage high standards of animal welfare in livestock markets, and the HSA welcomes the requirement that all market drovers must be trained in animal handling.

The HSA undertakes market visits and advises on improvements where necessary. Current legislation requires that animals have access to water, but in the HSA's view this should be strengthened to ensure that all animals have access to water during their stay in the market.

The HSA's position is that animals should be slaughtered as close to the point of production as possible, and farmers should consider selling their animals directly to the abattoir or through an electronic auction system. In this way animals avoid the unfamiliar and potentially stressful environment of a market. Whichever method of sale is used efforts should be made to keep transport distances to a minimum.

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 is an independent organisation, beholden to neither government nor trade pressures and, therefore, able to play an unbiased role in promoting the humane treatment of livestock.

It achieves its aims by arranging practical training sessions, by producing videos and publications, funding research projects, visiting markets and abattoirs and providing constructive advice and information for all those involved in animal handling, transport and slaughter. This positive, practical 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 corporate groups £50 and for those in full-time education £5.

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ANIMAL HANDLING AND WELFARE



What are livestock markets?

Livestock markets are places where, by tradition, farm animals are gathered from surrounding areas to be bought and sold. They have been in existence for hundreds of years, with one being located at Smithfield in London from as early as the 10th century. However, initially most animals were traded at large annual or biannual fairs. It was following changes to the tax laws in 1845 that regular weekly livestock markets became established in town and city centres. Then, as now, the market was both a business and social meeting point for local farmers.

The number of livestock markets has been in decline for the past fifty years, from a peak of about 1,000 to less than 150 today. Many of the remaining original, purpose-built, town-centre markets are being replaced with new out-of-town facilities located close to the major road networks, with easier accessibility and more space.

How are markets operated?

Market facilities may be privately owned or owned by the local authority, and leased or rented to firms of auctioneers. These firms are responsible for the organisation and operation of the sales, and receive a commission based on turnover – typically 3% to 4% of the sale price.

Market operators employ teams of drovers, on a permanent or casual basis, to handle the animals within the market. The welfare of the animals depends very much on the skill of these drovers, as handling by strangers can be a stressful experience for animals, exacerbated by new surroundings, noise and the proximity of unfamiliar animals.

Why are animals sent to market?

Livestock are usually sent to market because they:

- have reached their slaughter weight;
- are at the end of their productive life, either for milk production or breeding;
- are to be sold for further fattening, breeding or milking.

Which animals are sold in live markets?

Animals sold through markets are mainly cattle and sheep, but can include pigs, goats, other ruminants (eg deer, llamas), horses and rabbits. Poultry were also sold through markets until this was banned in 2005 because of fears over avian influenza. Markets may now sell poultry under licence, but it is understood that the number of live birds sold through livestock markets is very small.

Livestock Markets

How many animals are sold through livestock markets?

Markets sell finished (ready for slaughter), store (for further feeding) and breeding stock on a live weight basis. Typically producers are responsible for the transport of livestock to the market and the buyer for transport from the auction market. In 2006 of all farm animals sold in Great Britain, 23% (2.1million) of cattle, 45% (12.6million) of sheep and less than 1% (0.14million) of pigs were sold through livestock markets.

What happens to animals on their arrival at a market?

After unloading the animals are checked to ensure they are fit for sale, and if not they must be isolated and removed from the market. It is illegal to present an injured or unfit animal for auction. The animals are then numbered and penned according to species, size, weight, age, etc. Pens must not be overcrowded and unfamiliar animals which may fight must not be penned together.

Are animals given food and water?

Animals should have access to wholesome water to prevent them suffering from thirst, but animals that are in the market for a short period will not be fed. However, if animals remain overnight in a market they must be properly fed and watered.

Are all animals provided with bedding and covered accommodation?

Legislation requires that pigs, calves, lambs, kids, and dairy cattle and goats which are pregnant or in milk, must be provided with shelter and bedding. Poultry and rabbits must be protected from adverse weather. Cattle, sheep and horses may be penned outdoors on concrete flooring, but cannot be exposed to extreme weather conditions. Some markets provide covered accommodation for all livestock.

How should animals be handled in markets?

In an efficiently laid out and well run market, drovers should be able to move animals quietly and calmly through the raceways. Sticks may be carried as an extension of the arm, or for the protection of the handler. The use of electric goads, while permitted in certain circumstances, should be avoided as far as possible. Electric goads can only be used on adult cattle and pigs which refuse to move forward, and then only when they have room ahead of them in which to move. The shocks shall last no longer than one second, be adequately spaced out and only applied to the hindquarters of adult pigs and cattle. Shocks cannot be used repeatedly if the animal fails to respond. Legislation also forbids certain methods of lifting, dragging or carrying animals.

Drover training

Until recently there was no requirement for market drovers to be trained in animal handling. However, European Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 requires that since 5 January 2007 market staff must be trained in the requirements of the Regulation covering the fitness of animals to travel, handling of animals and the separation of animals of different species, different ages, etc. This requirement may be met by on-the-job training combined with practical experience, or by formal methods leading to an approved qualification.

How are animals sold?

Most cattle and calves, and some sheep and pigs, are sold through an auction ring. The animal(s) are moved around the enclosed ring by an experienced drover and/or the owner of the animal(s), in order to allow the buyers to view and bid for the stock. Animals may also be sold in their pens or cages, with the auctioneer and the buyers moving from pen to pen.

What happens after the sale?

Following the sale, animals of the same species, sold to the same buyer, are penned together. They are usually removed from the market within a few hours. This is particularly important for young animals, but occasionally adult animals may remain in the market overnight.

Are animals under stress in markets?

Animals which have been handled frequently on farm, for example dairy cattle, may cope more easily with the unfamiliar environment of a market. However, for the majority of animals the market can be a stressful experience, particularly when many may be tired and thirsty after a long journey. It is important that the drovers handle the animals calmly to reduce stress as much as possible.

Are animals in markets protected by law?

All animals (apart from horses), passing through a market in the UK, are protected by 'The Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990 (As amended)' (WAMO). Horses are protected by 'The Welfare of Horses at Markets (and Other Places of Sale) Order 1990' (WHMO) (details at www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/markets.htm). The welfare of animals in markets is also covered by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and relevant parts of European Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations (details at www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/transport/guidance.htm). The legislation is enforced by local authority Animal Health Officers, supported by the member(s) of market staff responsible for welfare. The AHVLA (formerly the State Veterinary Service) assesses each operating market twice a year. These visits monitor the standards at markets, taking into account assessments made by AHVLA staff in their regular market enforcement visits. This helps ensure that high standards are achieved consistently.

Can the public visit a market?

The public may visit livestock markets, but it should be borne in mind that markets are places of work and visitors should act accordingly. It is an offence to obstruct or annoy any animal in a market, and people must keep out of alleyways, pens and sale rings. If a visitor sees anything to cause concern, it should be reported immediately to the market management.

What are the alternatives to live markets?

The proportion of animals transported directly from the farm to the abattoir has increased significantly in the last 30 years. Most pigs and virtually all poultry are handled this way, with many producers contracted to the major processing