Humane Dispatch and Disposal of Kids and Lambs

SUMMARY
Goat and sheep farming may leave producers with a number of surplus male or unhealthy kids/lambs which will not be kept on as part of the herd/flock. Although these kids/lambs may be financially worthless, their welfare is no less important than that of any other animal. As a producer you have to make the decisions about selling, killing or rearing these animals. When it is necessary to kill kids/lambs, this should be done immediately, without causing avoidable excitement, pain or suffering, and under no circumstances should there be a delay which may result in kids/lambs being left without nourishment for an appreciable length of time. All owners, managers and stockmen must be aware of their legal and ethical responsibilities to these animals.

All farms should have an effective procedure to deal with unwanted kids/lambs as quickly and humanely as possible.

Regulations
Legislation requires that neither 'unnecessary suffering' (Animal Welfare Act 2006), nor 'unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress' (The Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968) is caused or allowed to be caused to any animal.
The MAFF Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock – Goats, states:

“If a goat has to be destroyed on the farm, this must be done humanely, and, where possible, by a person who is experienced in both the technique and the equipment used for slaughtering goats.”

“Unwanted kids should be treated as humanely as those being kept for rearing, and, if they are to be killed, arrangements should be made for this to be done as humanely as possible.”

There are also similar clauses in the MAFF Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock - Sheep.

Options available
There are three options open to owners when faced with unwanted or surplus kids/lambs. They may be sold-on for rearing, be killed, or be reared on their farm of origin for meat. Before coming to a decision producers will have to take into account, in order of priority, the welfare, practical and financial implications of each option. This leaflet concentrates on the practicalities of the humane dispatch and disposal of the animals.

Suitable methods
Your veterinary surgeon may be willing to kill and dispose of unwanted kids/lambs, but there will be a charge. The usual method is by an overdose of barbiturate; this makes the carcase unsuitable for both human and animal consumption. Hunt kennels may dispose of carcases, but it is highly likely that the kids/lambs will have to be taken to the knacker yard and that there will be a charge.

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If you decide to kill the animals yourself there are a number of alternatives:

- a heavy blow to the head - followed by severance of the major blood vessels and bleeding out
- free-bullet (shotguns -.410, or 28 bore; rifles -.22 rim-fire; or humane killers)
- captive-bolt equipment; followed by pithing or bleeding

In the case of unwanted kids/lambs, this is usually done soon after they are born; although some producers may wait until the kid/lamb has finished all the colostrum from the dam.

On-farm killing has welfare advantages in that animals are handled in familiar surroundings and without the need for transport. However, it should only ever be carried out by people who are confident and competent enough to carry out the task humanely.

**Heavy blow to the head followed by exsanguination**

This necessitates a very firm blow to the back of the head with a hard, blunt instrument such as a heavy piece of wood. The kid/lamb should be held up by its hind legs with one hand and promptly struck on the back of the head with the chosen implement. Alternatively, again with the kid/lamb held by its back legs, the back of its head should be struck against a hard object, such as a doorpost or stanchion. In order to be humane one has to be confident and forceful, it is better to hit the animals too hard rather than too lightly. If there is any doubt as to the effectiveness of the first blow, it should be repeated immediately, only much harder. Death of the unconscious animal should be ensured by cutting the throat from ear to ear.

**Small-bore shotguns, eg 28 Bore or .410**

In the hands of a competent operator, a shotgun is probably the best weapon for the humane destruction of kids/lambs. The correct use of a shotgun obviates the need to bleed and it is much safer than a rifle or pistol, as the shot disperses within the cranium, largely reducing the risk of operator injury. However, in the interest of operator safety, shotguns should not be used in enclosed spaces, on hard surfaces, or with people standing anywhere nearby. Also, the physical appearance of the kid/lamb after being shot can be very distressing. When using a shotgun you must have an up-to-date shotgun certificate.

The muzzle of the gun should be held about 3 - 4 inches away from the head, aiming at a point on the mid-line of the forehead above the eyes with the direction of shot angled down the spine into the main bulk of the body (Position 1, see next page). If head movement is a problem, an alternative position is with the muzzle of the gun held about 3 - 4 inches away from the head, aiming at a point on the mid-line behind the poll and toward the base of the tongue (Position 2). Ideally some form of restraint should be used (eg straw bales), and patience is the key.

**Humane killers (free-bullet weapons)**

Humane killers are free bullet weapons and as such can be extremely dangerous. They must only be used in Position 1 by experienced operators: usually veterinary surgeons, knackermen and hunt servants. These weapons discharge a round-nose, lead bullet which can over-penetr ate (especially in smaller animals, such as kids/lambs), exit the carcase and ricochet up to a mile. Therefore, humane killers should not be used in enclosed spaces or on hardstandings.
A .22 rim-fire rifle can be used in Position 1, preferably with a hollow-point bullet; but this should only be as a last resort, due to safety problems associated with the possible exiting of the bullet from the carcase. There may also be restrictions on the authorization of use of these weapons.

Position 1 - shotgun, humane killer and rifle      Position 2 - captive-bolt (alternative shotgun)

Due to the nature of a goat's skull, the position for captive-bolt stunning should always be from behind the bony ridge above the eyes. Do not attempt to shoot in position 1.

Captive-bolt pistols

Captive-bolt pistols are effective and safe, but it must be remembered that they are humane stunners not humane killers, i.e. the kid/lamb is rendered insensible to pain but not dead. Kids/lambs may be shot with a captive-bolt pistol using the appropriate sized cartridge (1 grain for baby kids/lambs; 1.25 grain for meat weight kids/lambs; 2.5 grain for adult goats/sheep). The site for shooting is Position 2, and the muzzle of the pistol should be held gently against the animal's head. The animal should be then bled to ensure rapid death.

A deep cut from ear to ear with a sharp knife will ensure all major vessels are severed; however, it is better to use a chest stick where possible. This involves inserting a knife into the chest just above the heart to sever the blood vessels as they leave the heart. Captive-bolt equipment must always be cleaned after use in order to prevent corrosion and pitting of the bolt. A build-up of carbon deposits in the breech can greatly reduce the velocity of the bolt; regular cleaning and maintenance will prevent this.

Captive-bolt equipment is no longer subject to firearms legislation (since February 1998), consequently it is now easier to obtain. However, when using captive-bolt equipment for the routine culling of livestock, 'in the course or furtherance of a business', it is necessary for the operator to hold a current slaughter licence (The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995).

To obtain a slaughter licence you must contact the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) (Tel: 01904 455501). A provisional licence will first be issued: you must then practise under the supervision of a licensed slaughterman. After sufficient training you will need an Official Veterinary Surgeon (OVS) or a meat trained Veterinary Officer (VO) to certify that you are competent at slaughtering these animals. The certificate of competence will then have to be sent to the MHS, with a fee (£20), to convert it into a full licence.

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Carcase disposal

Carcases should be sent for incineration or rendering – either directly, or via a knackery or hunt kennels. Carcasses can only be rendered at plants approved to render Specified Risk Material (SRM). If the animal has a passport, then the person who last has possession of the live animal must return it. Depending on the circumstances, the options for carcase disposal vary:

- collection by, or delivery to, a knackery, hunt kennels or licensed incinerator, for safe disposal
- disposal on-farm (The Animal By-Products Regulations 2005 and The Specified Risk Material Regulations 2000, and subsequent amendments will apply)

The only legal option now available for carcase disposal on-farm is incineration. Before installing an on-farm incinerator, checks will have to be made with Local Authorities, the Environment Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Under The Animal By-Products Regulations 2005 the burial and open burning of carcases such as fallen stock can only be permitted:

- in remote areas or
- during an outbreak of notifiable disease if there is a lack of capacity at rendering plants and incinerators, or because transport would spread the disease

‘Remote’ areas are interpreted as being parts of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the Scilly Isles and Lundy Island. The basic principle is that burial and burning should only be permitted where the carcase is more than 100 km away from the collection centre and the stocking density is very low. Before burying carcases, first check with your Divisional Veterinary Office that you are in an official remote area.

Failure to comply with current legislation could result in prosecution.

Further reading

Humane Killing of Livestock Using Firearms (2nd Edition) HSA 2005
Captive-Bolt Stunning of Livestock (3rd Edition) HSA 2001
Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock - Goats MAFF 1998

Full details of all legislation can be found on the following website, www.tso.co.uk

For enquiries about practical training in the correct use and maintenance of firearms and captive-bolt equipment, please contact the HSA at the address below.

WARNING: DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

In no circumstances can the HSA accept liability for the way in which the equipment in this leaflet is used: or for any loss, damage, death or injury caused thereby, since this depends on circumstances wholly outside the HSA’s control.

The only charity committed exclusively to the welfare of animals in markets, during transport and to the point of slaughter

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Taking a rational, practical approach, making real, lasting improvements to the welfare of food animals.

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