

Technical Note No 7

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 any avoidable pain, distress 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 documented procedure in place to deal with unwanted kids/lambs as quickly and humanely as possible.

Humane Slaughter Association

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Regulations

Legislation requires that animals shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations.

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 carcass unsuitable for both human and animal consumption. Hunt kennels may dispose of carcasses, 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.

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

- a heavy blow to the head (but this is only permitted in an emergency where there are no other methods available for stunning) - followed by severance of the major blood vessels and bleeding out
- free-bullet (shotguns - .410, or 28 bore; rifles - .17 or .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, e.g. 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 below). 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.

IMPORTANT

ON NO ACCOUNT WHATSOEVER MUST ANYONE HOLD THE KID/LAMB WHILST IT IS BEING SHOT

For safety reasons the use of shotguns and free-bullet weapons is not recommended, unless in the hands of a widely experienced operator.

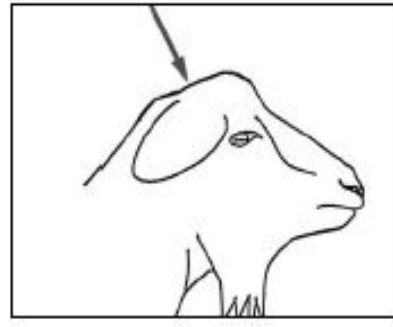
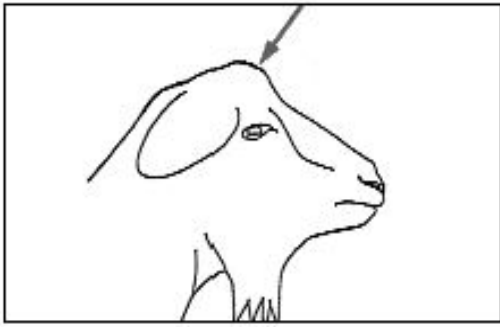
Humane killers (free-bullet weapons)

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-penetrate (especially in smaller animals, such as kids/lambs), exit the carcass and ricochet up to a mile. Therefore, humane killers should not be used in enclosed spaces or on hardstanding.

Rifles

A .17 or .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 carcass. There may also be restrictions on the authorisation of use of these weapons.

When using a rifle or humane killer, it is imperative that the correct ammunition is used: failure to do so can result in unnecessary suffering for the animal and potential danger for the operator.



Position 1 - shotgun, humane killer and rifle

Position 2 - captive-bolt (alternative shotgun)

Due 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 equipment

Captive-bolt instruments are effective and safe, but it must be remembered that they are humane stunners not humane killers, ie the kid/lamb is rendered insensible to pain but not dead. Kids/lambs may be stunned with a captive-bolt device 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 within 15 seconds 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, it is necessary for the operator to hold a current license registered with the competent authority (***The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015***)*.

To obtain a WATOK licence you must contact the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) (Tel: 0208 225 7636), and provide them with written evidence from an authorised veterinary surgeon that in his/her opinion you are:

- i) Competent to carry out the operations in respect of the category of animal and (where appropriate) type of equipment for which a licence is sought without causing the animal avoidable pain, distress or suffering; and
- ii) Have sufficient knowledge of the provisions of all relevant legislation and guidance relating to that operation, category of animal and (where appropriate) type of equipment for which the licence is sought.

You will have to pay the fees as specified in: *“The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015, Chapter 3, Regulation 24.”*

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 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. The burial and open burning of carcasses 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 carcasses, first check with your Divisional Veterinary Office that you are in an official remote area.

IMPORTANT

Failure to comply with current legislation could result in prosecution.

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

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 circumstance wholly outside the HSA’s control

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Further reading

Humane Killing of Livestock Using Firearms (2nd Edition)

HSA 2005

Captive-Bolt Stunning of Livestock (5th Edition)

HSA 2014

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015

Defra 2015

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Scotland) Regulations 2012

Scottish Ministers 2012

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Wales) Regulations 2014

Welsh Ministers 2014

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2014

DARD 2014

Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations

Defra 2011

The Specified Risk Material Regulations 2000 (as amended)

Defra 2000

The Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2010

Defra 2010

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

*See relevant Regulations for Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland