

Technical Note No 8

On-Farm Slaughter of Livestock for Consumption

Summary

Many people keeping livestock do so with the intention of 'keeping one for the freezer'. However, changes in legislation to control Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and increase food safety, have made this option increasingly difficult. Any person wishing to slaughter on-farm for human consumption should think carefully about how these controls affect them. Slaughtering your own animals is not an enviable task but, whatever the situation, all animals must be dealt with in a humane manner that will not cause them "any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations".

This leaflet (excluding poultry) aims to provide the information which will allow you to make an informed decision as to whether or not on-farm slaughter is a viable option for you. If not, now is the time to think about alternatives.

Under no circumstances can meat from animals killed on-farm be sold to any other person without first passing through a licensed abattoir for inspection and health marking.

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Legislation

When slaughtering on-farm, there are a number of regulations of which you need to be aware and with which you must comply. These are in place to safeguard animal welfare and food safety. Issues other than animal welfare are beyond the scope of this leaflet, but the relevant legislation is listed for your information on page 7. There are also environmental regulations that vary throughout the country: it is therefore important that you check with your Local Authority before carrying out any of the tasks related to home slaughter.

IMPORTANT

Failure to comply with current legislation could result in prosecution.

It is an offence to sell or to supply to another person, meat that has not been slaughtered and health marked in a licensed abattoir.

Owners of livestock may slaughter their animals on-farm, but it is an offence to supply the meat to any other person. You also need to have a full understanding of the conditions for the transport of animals to a place of slaughter and be aware of other regulations dealing with waste products and their disposal.

Are you prepared to kill your own livestock?

If you are prepared to slaughter, it is essential that you know exactly what to do. It is an offence to cause “any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations”. Lack of skill can lead to incidents of extreme cruelty, however unintentional this may be. The HSA recommends that you undergo training in the procedures you intend to use. Practising slaughter techniques on dead animals will help to prevent mistakes and will give you the confidence to cope if things do not go as planned.

Have you the facilities and equipment?

It is essential that you have the correct equipment, maintained in good working order. All equipment should be cleaned and maintained after each day’s use, and every six months if it hasn’t been used. One of the major problems of on-farm slaughter is the inability to physically handle the carcass and waste products. There has been an increase in food hygiene legislation and by-products controls that make this very difficult to do on-farm.

Methods of on-farm slaughter

Two methods can be employed to slaughter on-farm; free bullet weapons (rifles, shotguns and humane killers) or captive-bolt stunning followed by bleeding. The following information provides a guide to what is available and suitable. You should carefully assess and review your own individual circumstances before deciding.

Following a change in the firearms legislation in 1998, the captive-bolt is no longer classed as a firearm and, as such, does not require a firearm certificate. However, the HSA would recommend that when using the captive-bolt the operator should have had sufficient training to operate it competently and, if possible, to have obtained a WATOK slaughter licence.

Firearms can be suitable weapons, but a valid firearm certificate is required stating the species you intend to use it for. The use of firearms is strictly controlled by the police and the licensing officer will decide on an individual basis who can and cannot have a licence. Obtaining a licence can be a lengthy process, so you should always ensure you have a licence before any animals need to be slaughtered.

Used correctly, the captive-bolt is probably the safest method available. It uses blank cartridges to fire a captive, retractable metal bolt into the brain which stuns the animal. The captive-bolt is a humane stunner: **it is not a humane killer**. It is therefore a legal requirement to follow stunning with either bleeding or pithing. Pithing is no longer a legal option for cattle, sheep and goats entering the food chain: it can only be used for animals destined for burial, incineration or rendering. Where animals are to be used for human or animal consumption, the blood vessels in the throat or chest must be cut to ensure the animal dies from blood loss.

If you decide you do not want to carry out the slaughter process yourself, and decide to employ a slaughterman to kill the animals on farm, that individual must hold a certificate of competence and/or an authorised licence registered with the competent authority for the relevant operations undertaken.

IMPORTANT

When using a captive-bolt, the muzzle should be placed firmly against the head and fired. If a rifle or shotgun is used, the muzzle should be kept at least two inches away from the target.

Never place the muzzle of a rifle or shotgun in contact with the head, as this can cause serious injury or even death to the operator.

Restraint

The purpose of a good restraint system is to limit the movement of the animal, to ensure the accuracy of the shot, whilst keeping the stress experienced by the animal to a minimum.

Further details on the use of firearms and captive-bolts can be found in the HSA publications *Guidance Notes 2 Captive-Bolt Stunning of Livestock* and *Guidance Notes 3 Humane Killing of Livestock Using Firearms*.

IMPORTANT

Only skilled marksmen should attempt to kill livestock at a distance.

REMEMBER free bullets and captive-bolts can be dangerous. Never play around with them and always take your own safety into account.

Recognising an effective shot

When an animal is shot correctly, it will collapse immediately. The hind legs will be flexed into the body, muscles contracted and back arched. There is no rhythmic breathing, the eyes will have a fixed glazed appearance (there will be no blink reflex when the eye is touched), the jaw is relaxed with the tongue hanging out. Look for these signs: if you are in any doubt that the animal is not fully unconscious, reload the gun and shoot again. The captive-bolt only stuns the animal and it is vital that it is bled as soon as possible after shooting so that it dies from blood loss. Although after stunning the animal will be unconscious, it may kick due to spinal cord activity and great care must be taken to avoid being injured. This is especially so with pigs when stunned by a captive-bolt.

Bleeding

When using the captive-bolt method of stunning, it is essential that you bleed the animal immediately to ensure rapid death. The easiest way to bleed an animal is to cut the throat completely from ear to ear, exposing the spine and ensuring all major blood vessels are cut. Due to the unusual blood supply to the brain in cattle, it is worthwhile performing a chest stick (after the throat cut), by inserting the knife into the chest just above the heart to sever the blood vessels where they leave the heart and to ensure a rapid loss of consciousness.

The signs of an effective bleed out are rapid blood loss for around two minutes. Once the animal is bled out and the kicking has ceased, dressing may take place.

Religious slaughter

Animals slaughtered on-farm **must be stunned** first. Religious slaughter without pre-stunning is not permitted outside of a licensed abattoir.

IMPORTANT

Think now about how you would kill your animal. The more preparation and planning is involved, the less likely it is that something will go wrong.

Never start a process you are not confident and competent enough to finish.

Waste disposal

It is essential that waste and carcasses should be disposed of properly, ie sent for incineration or rendering. Ruminant carcasses can only be rendered at plants approved to render Specified Risk Material (SRM). If you are dealing with cattle and the animal has a passport, then the person who last has possession of the live animal must return the passport to the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS).

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.

Conclusions

When slaughtering animals on-farm, for whatever reason, you are entirely responsible for their welfare. You must ensure that you can carry out the task humanely and effectively. You are liable to prosecution if you cause the animal any avoidable pain, distress or suffering whilst carrying out the procedure.

Slaughtering off-farm

Meat that is to be supplied to any other person must go through a licensed abattoir, be inspected and have the health mark applied to indicate that it is safe for human consumption. In exceptional cases, some abattoirs will take an animal slaughtered on-farm, provided it is accompanied by a veterinary certificate.

If you are sending your animals to the abattoir, you must ensure:

- that the animal is fit to be transported to the abattoir and can be transported in a suitable manner
- that you make suitable arrangements with the abattoir, wherever possible well in advance of the date

There is a decreasing number of abattoirs that will take individual animals and return the carcass. Therefore you may have problems booking them in, unless you have done so well in advance of the slaughter date. If careful thought and forward planning are **not** given, your only option may be an abattoir a long distance away.

Slaughter on-farm

If you decide to slaughter on-farm, think carefully about how the animal is to be slaughtered:

- What species are you dealing with - do you have suitable equipment, in full working order?
- Who will slaughter the animal?
- Where will you slaughter the animal?
- When will you slaughter the animal?
- How will you slaughter the animal?

Plan the procedure; run through all the possible things that could go wrong, and ensure you have a back-up plan. You should also practise using the equipment on dead animals or other objects to get the feel of it and become confident.

Also, before you start, ensure that:

- You have a slaughter licence or shotgun/firearm certificate, if required
- You have the correct equipment and know how to use it
- You maintain all the equipment regularly and thoroughly
- You have suitable knowledge about the animal
- You are competent to carry out the task to completion
- When using a free bullet weapon, you are on soft ground with a safe backdrop

IMPORTANT

If you are in any doubt - DO NOT attempt to slaughter the animal.

The HSA strongly recommends that any person involved with the handling, restraint, stunning and slaughter/killing of animals should undergo some form of training and obtain a slaughter licence to ensure the highest animal welfare standards.

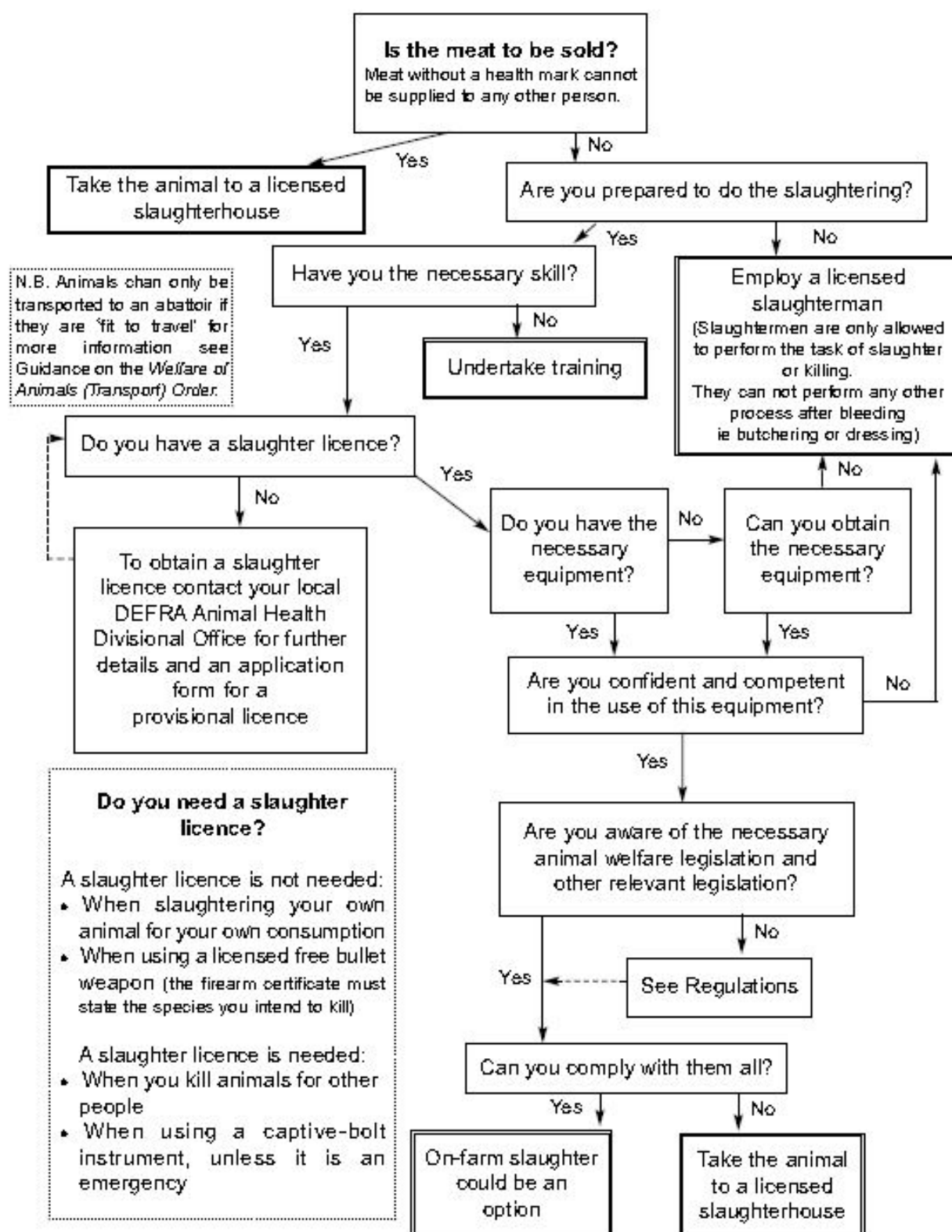
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Decision chart for on-farm slaughter



References

Humane Killing of Livestock Using Firearms (3rd Edition)
HSA 2005

Captive-Bolt Stunning of Livestock (5th Edition)
HSA 2014

Head Restraint of Cattle
HSA 2001

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
Website - www.defra.gov.uk

Food Standards Agency (FSA)
Website - www.fsa.gov.uk

Home slaughter of livestock – A guide to the law in England and Wales
Food Standards Agency

Environment Agency
Website - www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing
OJ/EU L303 24/9/2009

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015*
DEFRA SI 2015 No 1782

* Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have their own variations of this regulation

Council Regulation (EC) 853/2004 Laying down Specific Hygiene Rules for Food Stuffs
of Animal Origin
OJ/EU L139/55 30/4/2004

Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the Protection of Animals During Transport and
Related Operations
OJ/EU L3 5/1/2005

The Animal By-Products Regulations 2005

The Specified Risk Material Regulations 2000, and subsequent amendments

TSE Regulations

Full details of all legislation can be found on the following website: www.tso.co.uk
Details on poultry slaughter can be found in the HSA booklet, *Practical Slaughter of Poultry*.