

## Technical Note No 8

# UK On-Farm Slaughter of Cattle, Sheep, Goats and Pigs 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. 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 aims to provide the information which will allow you to make an informed decision as to whether 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 slaughtered on-farm be sold or given to anyone who lives outside the household without first passing through a licensed abattoir for inspection and health marking.**

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Registered in England Charity No 1159690 Charitable Incorporated Organisation

## Legislation

When slaughtering on-farm, there are several regulations you need to be aware of 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 8. 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 slaughter 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. Legally, you do not need a slaughter licence to slaughter your own livestock on-farm for your own consumption. However, **the HSA recommends 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.

The HSA can provide training in captive-bolt use for on-farm slaughter, please contact [training@hsa.org.uk](mailto:training@hsa.org.uk) for more information.

### 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 carcase 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 (.17 and .22 rim-fire only for close quarters use), 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.

The captive-bolt is not classed as a firearm and, as such, does not require a firearm certificate. However, **the HSA recommends that before using a captive-bolt device the operator should have had sufficient training to operate it competently** and, if possible, to have obtained a slaughter licence (known as a Certificate of Competence or WATOK licence). Please contact [training@hsa.org.uk](mailto:training@hsa.org.uk) for more information about our captive-bolt training sessions.

Firearms can be suitable weapons for on-farm slaughter, but a valid firearm certificate is required: it must have specific authorisation for the slaughter of animals for consumption, including 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 certificate. Obtaining a firearm certificate can be a lengthy process, so you should always ensure you have a certificate 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 licensed slaughterer to kill the animals on-farm, that individual must hold, for the species being slaughtered, a Certificate of Competence and/or a WATOK Licence for either:

- handling, restraint, captive-bolt stunning, (shackling, if used) and bleeding, or
- handling and restraint (if used) and killing using firearms

Licence holders using either method must also assess the effectiveness of the stunning and killing and monitor the animal for absence of signs of life.

## **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 online guides [www.hsa.org.uk/publications/online-guides](http://www.hsa.org.uk/publications/online-guides):

- [Captive-Bolt Stunning of Livestock](#)
- [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 slaughtering animals, it is important to assess the effectiveness of stunning and killing. 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 device 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. Monitor the animal during bleeding and check for the absence of signs of life. There should be no rhythmic breathing, and the eyes will have a fixed, glazed appearance. There should be no blink reflex when the eye is touched. Once the animal is bled out and the kicking has ceased, dressing may take place. It is good practice to check for the absence of a blink reflex before starting dressing procedures.

## **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**

If you carry out on-farm slaughter you must comply with the animal by-product (ABP) regulations 2013. Waste falls into three categories of materials and these determine how the material must be handled and disposed of. Refer to the [ABP regulation](#) for more information.

It is essential that waste and carcasses should be disposed of properly, i.e. sent for incineration or rendering. Ruminant carcasses can only be rendered at plants approved to render Specified Risk Material (SRM). The Animal and Plant Health Authority (APHA) or your local Authority (LA) can advise you on disposal options.

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. Although there are some derogations in place, this does not mean burial should be regarded as the first option in remote areas. 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. Carcasses or parts of carcasses from home slaughtered livestock cannot be moved to another premises for processing; they must be processed on-farm.

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

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

### **Private Slaughter**

Some abattoirs allow “private slaughter” or “private kill”. This is usually a smaller abattoir that will take in, slaughter and process smaller numbers of animals, and return the meat to the owner.

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.

### **Emergency slaughter**

When an animal is unfit for transport due to a recent injury/accident, but is still fit for human consumption, some abattoirs will take an animal slaughtered on-farm for further processing. This is classed as “emergency slaughter”. This requires a licensed slaughterer, an ante-mortem vet inspection by a specially trained vet and a veterinary certificate accompanying the carcass to the abattoir. The meat can then be sold into the food chain or consumed by the owner if it passes meat inspection at the abattoir. The planning and paperwork required for emergency slaughter can take some time so welfare of the animal should not be compromised. Close discussion with your vet is advised.

## *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 and/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.**

### **DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY**

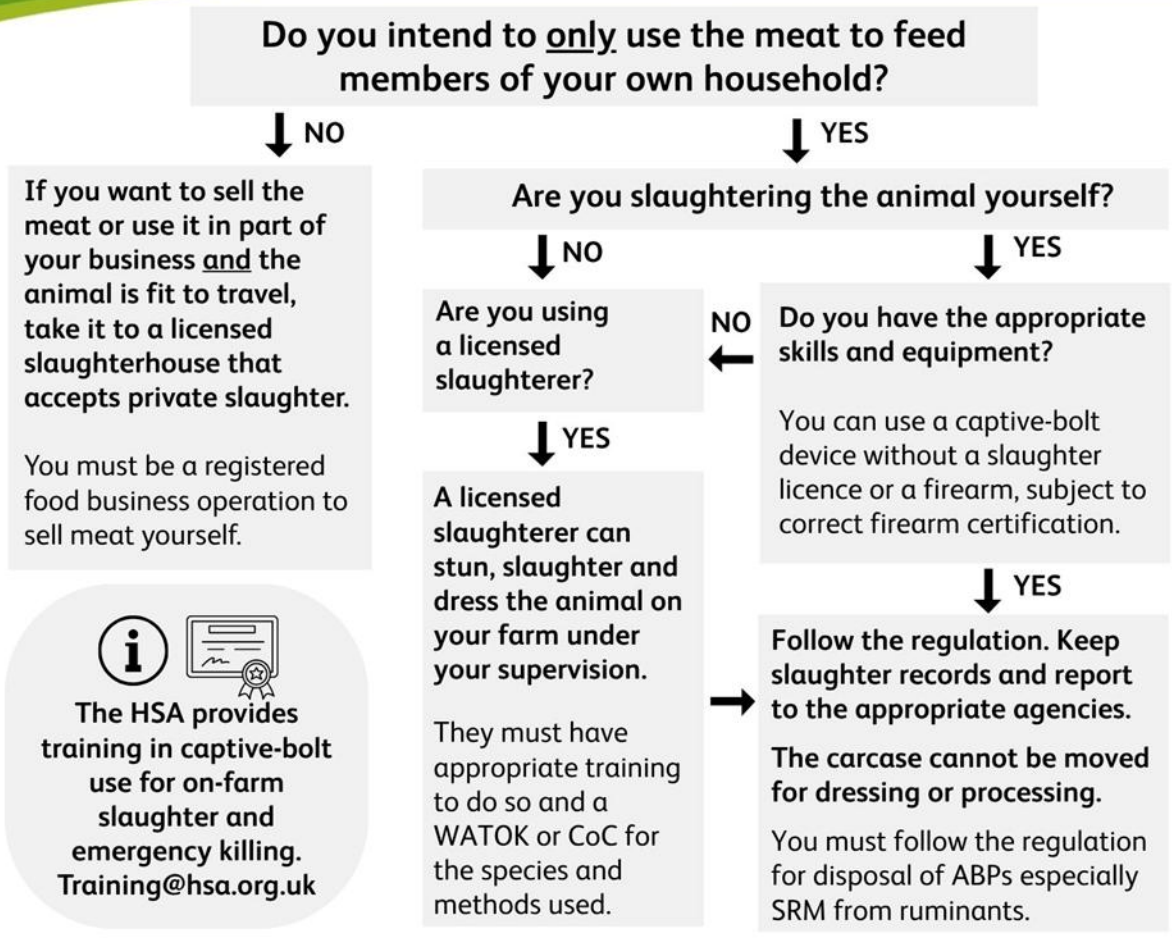
**In no circumstances can the HSA accept liability for the way in which the equipment in this leaflet is used: or for any loss, damage, death or injury caused thereby, since this depends on circumstance wholly outside the HSA's control**

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# Decision chart for on-farm slaughter


## On-farm slaughter






**The HSA provides training in captive-bolt use for on-farm slaughter and emergency killing.**  
[Training@hsa.org.uk](mailto:Training@hsa.org.uk)


### Emergency slaughter


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A recently injured animal, unfit to travel but otherwise healthy, may be eligible for on-farm emergency slaughter. The carcass can subsequently be transported to an abattoir, by agreement, for meat processing. If transport of the carcass takes longer than 2 hours it must be refrigerated. It must pass meat inspection for onward sale or consumption.
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These animals must have an ante-mortem inspection and certification by an Official Veterinarian and be slaughtered by a suitable CoC holder or vet.

### Emergency killing (not for consumption)

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You do not need a slaughter licence to humanely kill an injured or diseased animal **in an emergency**, where intervention is necessary to prevent further pain and suffering.
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You can call the vet, the knacker yard, a licensed slaughterer or firearm certificate holder for humane dispatch or kill the animal yourself if you have the equipment and skills to do so. Carcasses will more than likely require to be disposed of.

Caring beyond the farm gate

Registered Charity in England no 1159690: Charitable Incorporated Organisation



Humane Slaughter Association

## References

**HSA Online Guides:** [www.hsa.org.uk/publications/online-guides](http://www.hsa.org.uk/publications/online-guides)

- [Humane Killing of Livestock Using Firearms](#)
- [Captive-Bolt Stunning of Livestock](#)
- [Humane Handling of Livestock](#)

### Defra Guidance:

- Slaughter poultry, livestock and rabbits for home consumption

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/slaughter-poultry-livestock-and-rabbits-for-home-consumption>

- Certificate of Competence or licence to slaughter or kill animals

[www.gov.uk/guidance/get-a-certificate-of-competence-or-licence-to-slaughter-or-kill-animals](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-a-certificate-of-competence-or-licence-to-slaughter-or-kill-animals)

### FSA/FSS Guidance:

- Home slaughter of livestock: A guide to the law in England and Wales

[www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/home-slaughter-of-livestock-a-guide-to-the-law-in-england-and-wales-summary](http://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/home-slaughter-of-livestock-a-guide-to-the-law-in-england-and-wales-summary)

- Home slaughter guidance: A guide to the law in Scotland

[www.foodstandards.gov.scot/sites/default/files/migration/downloads/Home\\_Slaughter\\_guidance\\_-\\_April\\_2024.pdf](http://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/sites/default/files/migration/downloads/Home_Slaughter_guidance_-_April_2024.pdf)

### Relevant Legislation:

- Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2009/1099](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2009/1099)

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

[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1782](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1782)

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

- Regulation (EC) 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2005/1](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2005/1)

- Regulation (EC) 178/2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2002/178/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2002/178/contents)

- Regulation (EC) 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2004/852/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2004/852/contents)

- Regulation (EC) 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food stuffs of animal origin

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2004/853/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2004/853/contents)

- Regulation (EC) 999/2001 which lays down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) in animals

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2001/999/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2001/999/contents)

- Regulation (EC) 1069/2009 laying down health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2009/1069/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2009/1069/contents)

- Regulation (EU) 2017/625 which lays down rules on the performance of official controls and other official activities by the competent authorities

[www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2017/625/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2017/625/contents)

- The Food Hygiene and Safety (England) Regulations 2013

[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2996/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2996/contents)

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

- The General Food Regulations 2004

[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/3279/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/3279/contents)

- The Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2018

[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/731](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/731)

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

- The Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013

[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2952/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2952/contents)

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