

**Slaughter without stunning and food labeling****BRIEFING NOTE**Members

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Background and legislation

EU law requires farm animals to be stunned before slaughter. However, there is an exception for religious slaughter. Meat from animals slaughtered without stunning (through the Shechita method and some Halal methods) currently enters the mainstream food chain without being labelled, leaving consumers without their right to make an informed choice on animal welfare grounds.

Currently slaughter without prior stunning has been banned in Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Sweden and a ban is currently under judicial review in New Zealand. Finland, Denmark and Austria require stunning immediately after the incision if the animal has not been stunned before.

Although some religious slaughter practices do not allow pre-stunning, others do. For example all of the lamb imported to the UK from New Zealand is Halal but it has also been pre-stunned.

Legislation

EU law on slaughter is now contained in Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection on animals at the time of killing. The Regulation comes into force from 1st January 2013. According to the new legislation, animals shall only be killed after being stunned, except for religious reasons when Member States may allow it. ***However, in some Member States without stunning is used not as an exception but almost as a general rule resulting in large quantities of meat derived from animals slaughtered without stunning entering the main food chain.***

Food Labelling and recent developments

The European Parliament supported proposals to label products from non-stun slaughter but agreed to withdraw an amendment on the issue in order to achieve a consensus on Regulation 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers (July 2011).

The Regulation, in its Recital (50), states that the stunning of animals will now be considered in the context of future EU strategy for the protection and welfare of animals in 2012:

“Union consumers show an increasing interest in the implementation of the Union animal welfare rules at the time of slaughter, including whether the animal was stunned before slaughter. In this respect, a study on the opportunity to provide consumers with the relevant information on the stunning of animals should be considered in the context of a future Union strategy for the protection and welfare of animals.”

The Swedish delegation put also forward in the Agriculture council in May 2012 a note to enforce the general requirement to stun animals before slaughter.

FVE position

FVE is of the opinion that the practice of slaughtering animals without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circumstances and that animals should be effectively stunned before slaughter. FVE calls on policy makers to stop the excessive use of slaughter without stunning as a priority.

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However, as long as slaughter without stunning is permitted for religious reasons we believe that any meat or meat products from these sources should be clearly labelled to enable all consumers to make an informed choice based on welfare, ethics or personal belief when purchasing such products.

FVE feels it is important to differentiate between 'religious' and 'non-stun' slaughter. Our concern has nothing to do with the expression of religious belief but with the practice of killing by throat cutting without pre-stunning. ***FVE therefore advocate that labelling should refer to non-stun slaughter rather than a method of religious slaughter.***

Further information:

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is of the opinion that the practice of slaughtering animals without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circumstances.

http://www.fve.org/news/position_papers/animal_welfare/fve_02_104_slaughter_prior_stunning.pdf

Swedish delegation note submitted to the Agriculture Council 14-15 May 2012 regarding Enforcement of the general requirement to stun animals before slaughter

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/12/st09/st09704.en12.pdf>

The EU-funded DIALREL project (2006-2010) aimed to address issues relating to religious slaughter by encouraging dialogue between stakeholders and interested parties as well as gathering and dissemination of information.

<http://www.dialrel.eu/>

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), in a report published in 1985, concluded that religious slaughter involves the animal in greater suffering than methods involving pre-stunning.

'The up-to-date scientific evidence available and our own observations leave no doubt in our minds that religious methods of slaughter, even when carried out under ideal conditions, must result in a degree of pain, suffering and distress which does not occur in the properly stunned animal.'

Report on the Welfare of Livestock when Slaughtered by Religious Methods

<http://www.fawc.org.uk/pdf/old/livestock-report-1985.pdf>

In FAWC's 2003 report on welfare at slaughter of red meat animals it recommended an end of the exemption by which some animals are slaughtered without stunning. In the meantime, it recommended improvements in practice, including:

'Until the current exemption which permits slaughter without pre-stunning is repealed, Council recommends that any animal not stunned before slaughter should receive an immediate post-cut stun.'

Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing - Part 1: Red Meat Animals

<http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports/pb8347.pdf>

In May 2009 FAWC published a report on welfare at slaughter of white meat animals, e.g. chickens. It criticised slaughter without stunning and concluded that all birds should be pre-stunned before slaughter.

Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing – Part Two: White Meat Animals

<http://www.fawc.org.uk/pdf/report-090528.pdf>

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 44 veterinary organisations from 38 European countries, representing a total of around 200 000 veterinarians. For further information, consult the FVE website <http://www.fve.org> or contact the FVE Secretariat on Tel +32 2 533 70 20 or by e-mail to info@fve.org

What you can do?

Support FVE's efforts to ensure slaughter without stunning remains an exception and to make sure that the slaughtering of animals in the EU is limited to religious customers only.

Support future EU proposals to label all meat and meat products produced from animals slaughtered without prior stunning