

Annex A

Request

You requested the following information:

In light of the covid-19 situation (and associated social distancing and staff absences), I would like to make a request for information to help ascertain whether the presence of mandatory CCTV has made it easier to detect and act upon animal welfare incidents at English slaughterhouses.

With the covid-19 situation, physical in person surveillance of slaughterhouses would likely be harder for Official Vets, particularly in stunning and slaughter areas which may be harder to access and where it may be difficult to socially distance whilst monitoring animal welfare during the slaughter process.

I would like to know:

- 1. Across all English slaughterhouses (where CCTV is mandatory), how many animal welfare incidents were picked up by the Official Vet in person during the period 16th March 2020 to date (14th July 2020)?*
- 2. Across all English slaughterhouses where CCTV is now mandatory, how many animal welfare incidents were picked up via viewing/ reviewing footage on CCTV cameras during the period 16th March 2020 to date (14th July 2020)?*
- 3. Have the number of recorded animal welfare incidents increased since the covid-19 lockdown, relating to the period 16th March 2020 to date (14th July 2020), in comparison to the previous four months?*
- 4. Do you have any reports indicating that the ability to remotely access CCTV helped with continuing to monitor slaughterhouse processes and ensure legal compliance with regulations throughout this period 16th March 2020 to date (14th July 2020)?*

Response

The data in answer to your first three questions is provided in Annex B (Excel Spreadsheet). The data in Annex B shows the number of recorded incidents (please see below for incident definitions).

Regarding question 4, the FSA does not hold any reports.

Animal welfare within the slaughterhouse environment remains a high priority for FSA teams on site and existing levels of verification checks have remained in place throughout the COVID situation. FBOs have been proactive in the management of deliveries and their throughput to ensure any potential issues have been managed.

Where social distancing measures which have impacted on physical monitoring of animal welfare controls, teams in plants continue to have access to CCTV footage of all live animal areas of slaughterhouses in England.

Data context

You have requested data for incidents which were picked up by the Official Veterinarian (OV) however the database includes incidents which have been brought to the attention of the OV, either by another FSA or FBO member of staff as well as cases identified by an FSA Veterinary Auditor (VA), or Welfare Assurance Team (WAT) Inspector. However, all entries on the database would have been completed by the OV or VA.

In categorising incidents picked up by viewing/reviewing CCTV; these are solely instances where the non-compliance was first identified via CCTV, either in real-time, or retrospectively. Occasions whereby the OV observes the non-compliance in person, but then reviews via CCTV to appraise the incident, are not included, as these have been initially observed in person, and will be present in the response to question 1.

In response to the pandemic, and to ensure health and safety amongst all staff; the agency took the decision to dramatically reduce or defer all non-essential activity in plants; this includes FSA Veterinary Audit and WAT activity. Both assurance activities have the potential to identify breaches; typically involving minor non-compliances related to FBO business processes and record administration. This has, naturally, impacted on the overall level of breaches identified during the current time period. This decision was communicated in the open letter to industry published on the FSA website and is linked below.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/news-alerts/news/open-letter-to-the-meat-industry-in-england-in-response-to-coronavirus>

When reading the data in Annex B, please take into consideration that animal welfare non-compliances are categorised from 2-4. A full definition of these scores is included in the [Manual for Official Controls](#), chapter 2.3, section 3.4.3. But in summary they are defined as

Score	Descriptor	Definition
2	Minor non-compliance	An isolated low risk situation observed with the requirements of legislation but with no immediate risk of injury, avoidable pain distress or suffering. There was a technical infringement that does not impact on the welfare of animals.
3	Serious non-compliance	Welfare practices were observed as failing to comply with the requirements of legislation and there was no potential risk to animals. There were no animals suffering any avoidable pain, distress or

4	Critical non-compliance	Welfare practices were observed as failing to comply with legislative requirements, and there was evidence of animals suffering avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations or a contravention poses a serious and imminent risk to animal welfare. Welfare of animals during transportation was seriously compromised with evidence of animals suffering unnecessary or avoidable pain, distress or suffering. DOA red meat animals will require a 4 score as the cause of death is not determined. These will be referred to the Local Authority.
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Background

The FSA is responsible for approval of all slaughterhouses in England and Wales. The FSA's role focuses on ensuring those businesses are compliant with all specific requirements in hygiene and animal welfare legislation.

These requirements are monitored and enforced by Official Veterinarians of the FSA to ensure that animals are spared avoidable suffering, distress or pain during the slaughter process.

The FSA is responsible for the delivery of official controls in approved meat establishments (slaughterhouses, cutting plants and game handling establishments) subject to veterinary control within England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This work is carried out for the FSA by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland through a Service Level Agreement.

The FSA monitors and enforces welfare compliance in approved slaughterhouses on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England and the Welsh Government in Wales through a Service Level Agreement. The FSA has a zero-tolerance approach to animal welfare breaches and all staff are instructed to take prompt and proportionate enforcement action where breaches are identified. This means that we apply the enforcement hierarchy in a way that allows us to take informal enforcement action where breaches are minor and where we believe that this will be effective in avoiding future non-compliance, and take formal action, such as serving of notices or referring the matter for formal investigation in cases where non-compliance falls into the most severe categories which may have caused pain or suffering or where informal enforcement has not resulted in subsequent compliance by the business operator.

FSA official veterinarians and meat hygiene inspectors, either employed by the FSA, or supplied through an approved contractor, are typically present during processing of animals. They carry out a range of duties, including ante-mortem and post-mortem checks (checks on live animals and carcasses and offal) which include checks on the health and welfare of animals presented for slaughter. These official control duties ensure that food businesses operators have produced meat in accordance with

regulatory requirements, with a health mark applied to show that meat is safe to enter the food chain.