

SCOTTISH LIVESTOCK FARMERS CONCERNS AND RELIGIOUS SLAUGHTER IN THE UK.

Orr, J. and Farag, K.

Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 6JS. UK.

Karim.farag@rau.ac.uk

Abstract - Farmers in Scotland are more likely than ever to sell their animals into religious meat chains due to the rise of multiculturalism. However, the controversial use of non-stunning in some religious slaughter has angered animal welfare organisations. The British Vet Association (BVA) in 2014, called for a ban of the practice of non-stunning in the UK, causing a large amount of media attention. In this study, 151 Scottish livestock producers were surveyed and interviews were carried out with industry leaders and religious organisations, to gauge the view of farmers and understand why non-stunning is required by religious law. A fifth of the farmers who took part in this study stated they have knowingly sold livestock for religious slaughter in the past.

The results from the survey show that Scottish farmers have concerns regarding animal welfare when stunning is not used. A majority surveyed stated that non-stunning should be banned. Some EU countries have already taken the steps of banning or making it compulsory to post-stun the animal after the cut has been made at the point of slaughter. However, some farmers feel a ban would cause significant problems in regards to loss of markets, particularly with lamb. The Scottish Government believes the policy in place balances the rights of those to practice religion whilst maintaining high standards of animal welfare in Scotland.

Keywords: Animal Welfare, religious slaughter, Scottish farmers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of non-stunning in religious slaughter is one that has been fiercely debated in the UK and Europe. In most Western cultures, stunning is compulsory in the slaughter process as it is seen as the most humane way to kill an animal. However exemptions to this rule can be made on religious grounds. The hypothesis investigates if Scottish farmers have concerns regarding animal welfare when livestock is slaughtered without the use of stunning. There is no published research on

farmer's opinions on non-stunning or religious slaughter in Scotland. Halal (Islamic) or Shechita (Jewish) slaughter primarily involves the throat cutting of animals, which have not been stunned (Webster, 2011). The Scottish livestock industry primarily focuses on the rearing of cattle and sheep. As of June 2013, Scotland had approximately 1.8 million cattle, 6.57 million sheep, 308,000 pigs and 14.2 million poultry (RESAS, 2014).

The Scottish Government confirmed that currently no non-stunning occurs in Scotland. Only half of Scottish lamb is slaughtered in Scotland, with a majority of the other half being sold across the border to England and Wales (Scottish Executive, 2007). The BVA reports that in the UK, the non-stun slaughter of sheep and goats has increased by approximately 70% between 2003 and 2011 and non-stun slaughter of poultry has increased by 300% in the same period (BVA, 2013).

In 2013, the Food Standards Agency commissioned a survey looking at animal welfare, which looked at 301 red and white meat slaughterhouses in the UK. The report found that:

- 2% of cattle were not stunned
- 15% of sheep and goats were not stunned
- 3% of poultry were not stunned

- (FSA, 2015:4).

The Halal Food Authority predicts that Halal meat makes up around 15% of all meat consumed in UK (Eardley, 2014). In England alone, approximately 20% of all lamb that is bought is consumed by Muslims (EBLEX, 2010). There are concerns that some methods of religious slaughter, without pre-stunning, can compromise animal welfare. These include the stress that animal goes through in the restraints, how much pain the animal goes through once the throat is cut and how much distress occurs whilst bleeding out (Gregory, 2005). The Farm Animal Welfare Council stated in a report looking into the welfare of farmed animals that, "*it is difficult to measure pain and*

distress during the slaughter process in an objective scientific manner and subjective indicators” (FAWC, 2003).

Professor Temple Grandin of Colorado State University, carried out research in 1994 on whether cattle could feel the cut when killed, she concluded that, “*the animal was not aware its throat had been cut*” (Shechita UK, 2009). Professor Joe Regenstein of Cornell University supported Grandin, commenting in the New Statesman that traditional methods of slaughter cause large quantities of endomorphins to be released by the animal, inducing symptoms of numbness and euphoria (Hasan, 2012). However in 2009, Massey University in New Zealand contradicted this theory, with findings that measured brain signals suggesting that calves did experience pain if they were not stunned (Gibson et al. 2009).

The welfare of livestock is covered under legislation by EU Regulation 1099/2009, which protects animals at the time of killing (DEFRA, 2012). This regulation applies to all member states of the European Union, which the UK is a part of. Switzerland, Denmark, Poland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden have all banned non-stunning (Khaliq, 2014). Austria, Estonia, Finland and Slovakia require that the stunning occur immediately after the cut, if the animal has not been stunned (BVA, 2013).

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study involved using a significant amount of literature to gain insight into religion, non-stunning slaughter techniques, religious meat chains, how must non-stunning occurs in Scotland and the UK and animal welfare. A mixture of qualitative data was collected from questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires involved both paper based and online surveys being distributed. The internet is now recognized as the most important tool when collecting qualitative data and has over taken the use of face-to-face, postal and telephone data collection over the last decade (Poynter, 2010). The online survey was able to reach a larger audience, due to it being able to be easily distributed. The structured interviews were conducted with open ended questions. Interviews were conducted with Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment Richard Lochhead,

The National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS), Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) and Edinburgh Central Mosque.

The questionnaire was constructed to try and gauge how much knowledge farmers have about religious slaughter and non-stunning, if they were happy to sell livestock knowing they may not be stunned and if they wanted the practice banned in the UK. The survey consisted of 14 questions and a comments box. The questionnaire was designed, taking into consideration recent statistics that show the farming community in the UK has higher than average levels of the learning difficulty dyslexia. This was confirmed by the National Farmers Union of Scotland in March 2015 (BBC, 2015). This involved using larger fonts, splitting the online survey into several pages and using shorter questions with an easy to follow user interface. The online questionnaire was successful with over 130 respondents. However, there was a low response rate with the paper questionnaires with 12 out of the 40 sent out returned however as stated by Keats, postal responses can be as low as 30% in some studies (Keats, 2000). Other questionnaires were filled out handed directly back to the author making the total of surveys returned at 151. This was far more than expected, with a target at the start of the investigation being 100. All interviews were carried out between December 2014 and January 2015. The importance of interviews is critical as allows valuable data to be collected and for individual differences between interviewees to be uncovered (Keats, 2000). The data cannot be statically analyzed but can give a range of opinions and information on the topic.

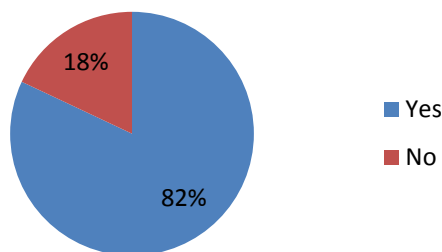
III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaires

The main themes from the survey were that farmers had animal welfare concerns when livestock is not stunned. Over a third of respondents were women and a vast majority of participant’s farm beef and lamb, which reflects the Scottish livestock industry. Three quarters of farmers stated that they would not be happy to sell livestock for religious slaughter, knowing they may not be stunned before death. What was clear from the results was that even though a majority of farmers felt they had not been provided enough

information on the matter from the Scottish and UK governments, 70% of farmers felt they understood the differences between non-stunning and religious slaughter. A majority had read about the topic in agricultural publications and discussed with other farmers, the rural community and family suggesting these are the most likely ways farmers are getting information on the matter. Only 14% of farmers would be happy to consume non-stunned meat, which contradicts a study in 2012 that found 73% of consumers said they did not actively avoid meat that was not stunned before slaughter (Canadean report, 2014). The pie chart below shows that 82% of Scottish livestock farmers, want a ban of non-stunning in Scotland and the UK.

Figure 1. Shows the percentages of participants who were asked if non-stunning should be banned in Scotland and the UK.



Twenty percent of Scottish farmers confirmed they had knowingly sold livestock for religious slaughter, showing that even though non-stunning is not practiced in Scotland, the issue can still affect its livestock producers. Interestingly, 46% of farmers however said that they would in the future consider selling livestock knowing there would be a small chance stunning might not be used. This shows the dilemma faced by farmers stated in several comments in the survey that if the price was right, it would not make economic sense not to sell to that specific market. 61% of Scottish farmers felt that non-stunning is a bigger issue for England and Wales. This is likely due to awareness that there are more religious minorities in those countries. The comments left at the end of the survey show frustration amongst farmers that religion is being put ahead of animal welfare.

None of the farmers who commented expressed concerns with religious slaughter, it was the non-stunning aspect that caused worry. Many expressed anger that in a developed country such as the UK, such an 'outdated' practice was still being used by a small minority. One participant stated, "I think it is a disgrace that non-stunning is allowed in this country when we have such high welfare standards." A few did express support, stating that non-stunning is important and that without it, religious minorities would simply import from other countries, meaning farmers losing out on a growing market.

Interviews

The interviews with NFUS and QMS came to very similar conclusions, that farmers are not to their knowledge, concerned about religious slaughter. They are however concerned with non-stunning and welfare implications this may have for their livestock. NFUS said the BVA campaign to ban non-stunning caused discussion amongst its members however no research has been done on their views on the matter. Through QMS assurance schemes Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb, it guarantees all animals have been stunned before slaughter. The Scottish Government stated the importance of respecting religious faith's as Scotland is a multicultural society. It believes the policy is fair and balanced for all parties involved and no changes in the law are currently planned in Scotland. If more information was required from Scottish farmers on non-stunning, the Scottish Government would comply, however there have not been such requests.

Edinburgh Central Mosque stated that Islam embraces anything that allows the slaughter to be more merciful. Non-stunning is not encouraged because it can sometimes kill the animal, which means the meat would be 'haram' or prohibited. Muslims are forbidden to consume meat that is not killed in the correct way. The animal must be healthy and conscious before death. It is clear from literature and interview that both Islam and Judaism truly believe that the non-stunning methods used in slaughter do not cause unnecessary pain or distress to the animal, if the techniques used are carried out correctly.

IV. CONCLUSION

What is clear is that animal welfare is a concern for all parties involved. Farmers want the best possible slaughter for their livestock and non-stunning is viewed as something that compromises this. Islamic and Jewish religious groups advocate that non-stunning is not jeopardising animal welfare, as the knife is so sharp and the method so quick, the animal feels no pain. Livestock producers and consumers cannot make informed decisions on non-stunning, without knowing that without stunning, the animal goes through unnecessary pain or distress. A majority of Scottish farmers want non-stunning banned in Scotland and the UK. Three quarters are not happy to sell livestock to be slaughtered without the use of stunning. However there is a small market for non-stunned meat in the UK, which needs to be supplied. If the price is right, it may risk ethical dilemmas for farmers in the future. They may feel they are putting business ahead of animal welfare. Significantly more independent, unbiased research looking at non-stunning and animal welfare is required. Until this is achieved, it is clear farmers do have concerns about animal welfare when non-stunning is used.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all the Scottish livestock farmers who took the time to fill out the survey and to all persons interviewed. The authors would also like to express gratitude to the support from the Royal Agricultural University.

REFERENCES

1. BBC (2015). Dyslexic farmers' plight highlighted [Online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-south-scotland-31814105> (Accessed 5th April 2015).
2. British Vet Association (2013). BVA Parliamentary Briefing - Slaughter without stunning and food labelling - 29 October 2013.
3. Canadean report (2014). Most consumers not concerned about Halal meat. [Online] Available at: <http://www.canadean.com/news/most-consumers-not-concerned-about-halal-meat/> [Accessed 31st December. 2014].
4. DEFRA (2012) Guidance - Slaughter of livestock: welfare regulations. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/farm-animal-welfare-at-slaughter> (Accessed 31st December. 2014)
5. Eardley, N (2014) What is halal meat? – BBC News [Online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27324224> (Assessed 27th December 2014)
6. EBLEX (2010). The Halal Meat Market - Specialist supply chain structures & consumer purchase & consumption profiles in England. HD Communications Ltd, UK.
7. Farm Animal Welfare Council (2003). Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing Part 1: Red Meat Animals. DEFRA Publications, UK.
8. Food Standards Agency (2015). Results of the 2013 animal welfare survey in Great Britain. Page 4. No publisher.
9. Gibson, T. J et al. (2009). Electroencephalographic responses of halothane-anaesthetised calves to slaughter by ventral-neck incision without prior stunning. *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*. 57(2).
10. Grandin, T. (1994). Slaughter: Religious Slaughter and Animal Welfare. A Discussion for Meat Scientists. *Meat Focus*. 3:115-123
11. Gregory, N.G (2005). Recent concerns about stunning and slaughter. *Meat Science* 70. 481-491.
12. Hasan, M (2012). Mehdi Hasan on the not-so-hidden fear behind Halal hysteria – The New Statesman [online] Available at: <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2012/05/halal-hysteria> (Accessed 30th January 2015)
13. Keats, D (2000). Interviewing: A Practical Guide For Students And Professionals. 1st Edition. Open University Press, PA, USA.
14. Khaliq, I (2014). Denmark bans non-stun slaughter of animals - The Muslim News. [Online] Available at: <http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/world-news/denmark-bans-non-stun-slaughter-animals/>. (Accessed 4th March 2015).
15. Poynter, R (2010). The Handbook of Online and Social Media Research: Tools and Techniques for Market Researchers. 1st Edition. Wiley & Sons. West Sussex, UK.
16. RESAS (2014). Scottish Government Economic Report on Scottish Agriculture – 2014 Edition. APS Group Scotland. Edinburgh, UK.
17. Scottish Executive (2007). Scottish Primary Food and Drink Produce Processed in Scotland. DTZ, Edinburgh, UK.
18. Shechita UK (2009). A Guide to Shechita. Shechita UK, London, UK.
19. Webster, J (2011). Management and Welfare of Farm Animals: The UFAW Farm Handbook. 5th Edition. Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, UK.