

Implementation of regulatory best practice in animal welfare and upskilling of meat sector

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Abstract – The new animal welfare regulations EC1099/2009 (S.I. 292/2013), which are aimed the protection of animals at the time of killing, puts in place a series of measures aimed at avoiding pain and minimizing unnecessary suffering and distress during the slaughtering process. The regulation places strong emphasis on well trained and skilled abattoir operatives where personnel carrying out certain slaughter operations are required to hold a certificate of competence relevant to the task that they perform.

Key Words – Welfare, slaughter, code of practice

I. INTRODUCTION

Whilst management of animal welfare is now a formalised and controlled (EC 1099/2009) legal imperative it is also a subject which is a fundamental requirement of integrated national food assurance programmes. A good example of this can be demonstrated by the introduction of the new Bord Bia Meat Products Quality Assurance Scheme standard (MPQAS) which was launched in October 2013. Both regulation EC1099/2009 and the MPQAS standard have as an underlining theme the basis of what has become commonly termed the ‘five freedoms’ i.e. freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain injury or disease, freedom to express normal behavior and free from fear and distress. In later years a possible sixth freedom has crept into this concept and that is the freedom to be free. This is of particular interest in the Irish context where animals, particularly sheep and cattle, spend much of their lifespan roaming around greed lush pastures. It is now also well accepted that good welfare practices is directly correlated with subsequent meat quality.

In response to the new animal welfare regulations and the requirement to improve the ultimate quality of meat Teagasc and RBAI have implemented a comprehensive training programme for abattoir operatives both in the area of welfare competencies and also welfare management. Recently Teagasc and RBAI have also developed a new animal welfare code of best practice for abattoirs which will be launched in autumn 2017.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In response to the new animal welfare regulations Teagasc have implemented a comprehensive training programme for abattoir operatives both in the area of welfare competencies and also welfare management. This training programme has been approved through the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine (DAFM), Food and Drink Qualification (FDQ) and Tesco UK. The training programme also underwent a regulatory compliance audit through the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO).

The code of best practice for welfare has been developed in conjunction with relevant stakeholders and covers more in depth detail of all the competencies as outlined in current regulations

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To date approximately 4000 meat industry personnel have been trained on animal welfare and undergone certificate of competence theory assessments representing in excess of 100 large and medium size meat enterprises.

The welfare standard in summary covers areas that are pertinent to good animal welfare including good animal handling practice, facilities layout and design, equipment used in the handling and stunning of animals and a risk assessment methodology for the monitoring of “welfare pressure points” in the slaughter and associated production processes

IV. CONCLUSION

Assuring the welfare of meat producing animals is now heavily embedded in legislation and food assurance standards and has a direct impact on the quality and safety of the food we eat. Research into ways of enhancing and improving meat quality and safety post slaughter has been extensively researched and prioritised at Teagasc Ashtown Food Research Centre (AFRC) over many years, further emphasising the importance of this topic.

Animal welfare management is now a prerequisite requirement for all stakeholders in the meat industry. It involves insuring that the five animal freedoms are met and where possible the sixth animal freedom is addressed and communicated to key stakeholders. Death of animals for meat production is a given however the focus has to be on ensuring that the suffering of animal is minimised to the best of our skills and technical ability.

Teagasc through certified training programmes, targeted research and development of best practice standards are ensuring that welfare and subsequent meat quality attributes are enhanced throughout the meat sector.

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