

Food Standards Agency: Information released under the Freedom of Information Act

Date released: 8 December 2017

Request

Earlier this year I submitted a request for animal welfare non-compliances at slaughterhouses.

Could you kindly replicate that request for 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2016/2017 with the additional request that you list the country in which the breach occurred?

Response

I have attached to this response the requested data in Annex A attached. The data has been taken from the Food Standard's Agency (FSA) animal welfare database covering the periods April 2012 to March 2013, April 2013 to March 2014, April 2016 to February 2017 and March 2017 to November 2017. Some of the information in response to your request is exempt under sections 31, 38 and 40 of the Act.

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 (DAERA) in Northern Ireland through a Service Level Agreement. The FSA was also responsible for this work in Scotland until 30 March 2015 and figures are included until that date, if you require data for Scotland after this date you will need to contact Food Standards Scotland directly.

The FSA monitors and enforces welfare compliance in approved slaughterhouses on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in England and 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 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.

A number of reported animal welfare non-compliances relate to the suitability of transport facilities and condition of the animals upon arrival at an abattoir from a farm. These are separate to any issues occurring at the abattoir, but are detected by FSA officials on the animals' arrival. The findings are referred to Local Authorities / Trading Standards Officers in the case of welfare in transport issues, and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) where the issue originated on farm. Local Authority / Trading Standards Officers have enforcement responsibility for transport, with APHA enforcing welfare issues on farm. For these reasons we have not included data relating to transport or on-farm related non-compliances as these are the enforcement responsibility of either Trading Standards or APHA.

At the FSA Open Board meeting on 21 September 2016 the FSA approach to animal welfare was discussed and you may find the following link useful for more information.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/our-board/meetings/2016/010116/board-meeting-agenda-21-september-2016>

During that meeting the animal welfare assurance programme was explained and is based on the principles of "Deter, Prevent, Detect, Enforce" in line with good practice in wider law enforcement. This Welfare Assurance Programme, sponsored in partnership with Defra, clearly sets out the FSA ambition and approach enabling tracking of FSA and industry performance.

Delivery of this programme of activities can be summarised under four key themes:

- a) Strengthening verification of compliance
- b) Clarifying accountability and improving collaboration
- c) Improving education and instruction
- d) Better analysis and reporting

The FSA animal welfare database for data pre March 2017 provides information on non-compliances in relation to animal welfare legislation. The FSA currently uses a system of exception reporting. The categories and definitions of non-compliances that we report quarterly to the FSA Board Business Committee are:

- Score 3 - 'Major' non-compliances which are likely to compromise animal welfare but there is no immediate risk to the animal - although the non-compliances may lead to a situation that poses a risk to animals.
- Score 4 - 'Critical' non-compliances are considered to pose a serious and imminent risk to animal welfare or are ones where avoidable pain distress or suffering has been caused.

The data provided shows the number of 'Critical' non-compliances recorded and 'Major' non-compliances.

As requested, we have anonymised the data via deterministic modification assigning a code to each slaughterhouse. We have categorised each major and critical non-

compliance by type of slaughterhouse (red meat or poultry), and point in the process where the non-compliance occurred. However we believe to provide any more granular information would run an unacceptable risk of individual establishments being identified so we have decided to exempt the release of this data using the exemptions provided in Annex B.

Please also be aware that in the sections where the same exception has been recorded at a specific location, there may be one action dealing with all the relevant non-compliances. For example not each 'referral for investigation' or 'written advice' would necessarily relate to a separate and individual incident if it was for the same issue in a similar period of time. Similarly an exception may cover more than one animal.

The enforcement action that FSA Official Veterinarians (OV) take follows a defined hierarchy: Verbal, Written, Enforcement Notice, Referral for Investigation. Where compliance has not been achieved by the Business Operator the OV will escalate the enforcement action up the hierarchy. The result of this is that one non-compliance may have multiple enforcement actions associated with it. From March 2017, the animal welfare database records the hierarchy of enforcement action taken against each non-compliance.

We have been unable to fulfil your request to have the data presented by country. The animal welfare database does not hold data by country names or indicators; furthermore, to disclose the country location of any plant would risk potential identification. It is possible that countries in the UK may have several plants, but only one, say, where they process specific animals.