

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

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Request

- 1. What regular checks are carried out to ensure that chickens stunned for halal do not present any signs of consciousness or sensibility in the period between the end of the stunning process and death; such checks are required by Article 5.1 of Regulation 1099/2009? How often are such checks carried out and on what proportion of chickens are they carried out?***
- 2. as it can be difficult to differentiate between a properly stunned chicken and one that has been electro-immobilised but remains conscious, what guidance is issued to Official Veterinarians (OVs) as to how to assess if a chicken has been properly stunned rather than being electro-immobilised?***
- 3. How often has ineffective stunning been reported by OVs as regards chickens being stunned for Halal in (i) 2015, (ii) 2016 and (iii) to date in 2017.***
- 4. What proportion of chickens stunned for Halal were stunned with frequencies of 800 HZ or above in (i) 2015, (ii) 2016 and (iii) to date in 2017?***
- 5. What steps does the FSA take to remind business operators of slaughterhouses that stun chickens for Halal that though they are not bound by Table 2 of Chapter II of Annex I to EU Regulation 1099/2009, they are obliged to comply with Articles 3 and 5 of that Regulation?***

Response

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 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.

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.

Although it is the primary responsibility of the food business operator to safeguard animal welfare, FSA staff and their contractors ensure they meet this responsibility through the legal framework of Official Controls. There is no excuse for any degree of animals' avoidable pain, distress or suffering during killing and related operations. It is an offence to cause or permit an animal to suffer avoidable excitement, pain or suffering and at slaughter animals must be handled, stunned and killed using specific methods by licensed and competent slaughterers.

I will answer your questions as follows:

- 1. What regular checks are carried out to ensure that chickens stunned for halal do not present any signs of consciousness or sensibility in the period between the end of the stunning process and death; such checks are required by Article 5.1 of Regulation 1099/2009? How often are such checks carried out and on what proportion of chickens are they carried out?*

The checks required by Article 5.1 are checks which must be carried out by the Business Operator. Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing Article 5 requires the Business Operator to ensure that persons responsible for stunning, or other nominated staff e.g. Animal Welfare Officer, carry out regular checks to ensure that the animals do not present any signs of consciousness or sensibility in the period between the end of the stunning process and death.

These checks must be carried out on a representative sample of animals and the frequency established by taking into account the outcome of previous checks and any factors which may affect the efficiency of the stunning process. A record must be kept of the checks carried out.

The Standard Operating Procedure should determine the frequency of checks and any factors used to reduce the checks. When the checks indicate that an animal is not properly stunned, the person in charge of stunning must immediately take appropriate measures as specified in the standard operating procedures. The Business Operator must detail checks they do in the Standard Operating Procedure and keep records of such checks which will be reviewed by the FSA team onsite.

In addition to checks carried out by the Business Operator the FSA team will also carry out including but not limited to inspection and verification of Business Operator compliance with welfare legislation, appropriate enforcement action and recoding of incidents, ensuring that the Business Operator and the staff follow the procedures laid down in the Standard Operating Procedures and welfare surveillance.

The frequency of checks is risk based and can vary between premises; the legislation is not prescriptive on numbers or frequency.

2. *As it can be difficult to differentiate between a properly stunned chicken and one that has been electro-immobilised but remains conscious, what guidance is issued to Official Veterinarians (OVs) as to how to assess if a chicken has been properly stunned rather than being electro-immobilised?*

The FSA team in all premises are required to complete welfare checks on a daily basis using an aide memoire provided. The FSA issued guidance on signs of an effective stun through welfare indicator cards supplied to all FSA teams. In addition there is guidance produced by European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to which there are links provided to all FSA staff in the Manual for Official Controls. The link provided for poultry is <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/3521>.

3. *How often has ineffective stunning been reported by OVs as regards chickens being stunned for Halal in (i) 2015, (ii) 2016 and (iii) to date in 2017.*

Year	2015	2016	2017
Number of ineffective stunning reported by the FSA.	3	1	2

4. *What proportion of chickens stunned for Halal were stunned with frequencies of 800 HZ or above in (i) 2015, (ii) 2016 and (iii) to date in 2017?*

In 2016 the FSA completed a survey of slaughterhouses carrying out slaughter without prior stunning on behalf of Defra and the information you have requested would be available in the results of that survey for 2015 only. The FSA therefore currently holds information on behalf of Defra on what proportion of chickens stunned for Halal were stunned with the frequencies you request. I would suggest contacting Defra directly for this information. The contact point in Defra for this would be Sue Whitehead and she can be contacted on sue.whitehead@defra.gsi.gov.uk. In relation to 2016 and 2017 to date the FSA does not hold this information.

5. *What steps does the FSA take to remind business operators of slaughterhouses that stun chickens for Halal that though they are not bound by Table 2 of Chapter II of Annex I to EU Regulation 1099/2009, they are obliged to comply with Articles 3 and 5 of that Regulation?*

All Business Operators must comply with the requirements of EC1099/2009 and those in Articles 3 and 5. It is the responsibility of the Business Operator to carry out these checks and the FSA will monitor the Business Operator actions to ensure compliance as well as carrying out our own checks regularly through the day. If the Business Operator does not carry out and record such checks then appropriate enforcement action will be taken by the FSA Official Veterinarian.