



Introduction

The Abattoir Sector Group has been set up to provide a unified voice for the small and local abattoir sector on issues that affect them, and to advise government on behalf of the industry.

Over the last few years, there has been a rapid rise in consumer awareness of sustainability and animal welfare issues, and demand for local, traceable and high welfare food has increased exponentially. There is also a rising wider need to address issues of climate change, biodiversity decline and environmental degradation. Interest has grown around the concept of ‘One Health’ which aims to achieve optimal health and well-being outcomes recognising the interconnections between people, animals, plants and their shared environment. Smaller abattoirs are a critical part of this infrastructure of sustainable, local food supply chains. They are able to reduce environmental impacts in meat production through smaller-scale, less intensive and more diversified production systems, including organic, pasture-fed and native breed livestock. Alongside all of this, a network of thriving local abattoirs across the UK can lower the distances animals must travel to slaughter which both improves animal welfare and reduces food miles.

Unfortunately, smaller abattoirs have been in significant decline in recent years, with a third having been lost in the past decade alone. This has been for a number of reasons connected to bureaucracy, regulation and running costs. Yet during the COVID-19 pandemic the smaller abattoir sector has recorded a 10% increase in production this year, indicating how they have been critical to the resilience of the food supply network. They have demonstrated that having more operational flexibility and being able to adapt to new circumstances, for example, butchers moving orders online, abattoirs taking new customers, can directly serve local people in a personal and community-focused way which the public trusts in times of crisis as well as acting as an alternative route to market for farmers who usually rely on centralised supply chains. The loss of smaller abattoirs is a serious threat to food security and it is clear that a distributed supply chain is more resilient to shocks and carries a lower level of risk. For all of these reasons, ASG believes it is critical that the decline of smaller abattoirs is stopped and that Government and the sector consider how the remaining operators can be supported.

Now the UK have left the EU, as agricultural support systems change across the UK, many livestock farmers will be seeking ways to add value to their products. Selling direct to consumers can more than double the value of an animal, but the services of a local abattoir are critical to enable this. Local and smaller abattoirs support different business models for farmers enabling them to diversify and also to maximise all elements of the animal. This boosts local economies and delivers longer chains of return to small businesses. Smaller abattoirs, however, have struggled to invest in their businesses up to this point and have not been able to access some of the funding pots available to large-scale operators. The landmark Agriculture Act received Royal Assent on 11 November this year and, through the successful lobbying efforts of several government and non-government organisations – some of whom are represented within the Abattoir Sector Group – the act offers scope for financial support of the small abattoir sector with slaughtering and processing being included as ancillary activities. This offers a timely opportunity to take a coordinated approach to the development of small abattoir infrastructure that is truly fit for purpose for the UK going forwards.

Now, as we leave the EU and shape our own farming and food policies, we must not overlook the full breadth of supply chain infrastructure. There is an urgent need for greater connectivity, both across government and in our approach to sustainability in the sector. The principles of the circular economy are paramount when addressing multiple product streams, from edible meat to compostable by-products. ASG looks forward to discussing these important issues with Defra, DAs, FSA, DIT, enterprise agencies and other government and

non-government organisations in the four devolved regions of the United Kingdom and, ultimately, working towards a vibrant and sustainable network of vitally important small abattoirs.

Background

The ASG is made up of influential organisations and operators to advise Government on behalf of the sector on strategically important issues and standards affecting local food production and the role of small abattoirs within that system. The ASG was formed as a result of the recommendation for a representative sector group within the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare's report entitled *The Future for Small Abattoirs in the UK*. In 2019, the APGAW held a lengthy inquiry into abattoir provision in which it mapped the current operators and considered implications for animal health & welfare, food quality, waste disposal, economics and trade.

Mission Statement

The mission of the ASG is to support and develop a thriving network of local abattoirs across the UK.

We will do this by raising the importance of small abattoirs across Governments, ensuring they are included in all relevant policy formation, seeking access to funding and sharing best practice to help small abattoirs play a vital role in local food production.

Aims

1. To foster coordination and cooperation between Government departments in the regulation and support of small abattoirs
2. To work with DEFRA & the devolved administrations to provide a framework for financial support for smaller abattoirs based around maintaining high standards of food safety and animal welfare
3. To signpost or provide information on best practice for smaller abattoirs and farmers via our website and virtual meetings
4. To support research applicable to the sustainable management of smaller abattoirs including Animal By-Products and the development and adoption of new technologies for the sector.

Rationale

- The Government is committed to upholding standards of food safety and animal welfare in this country and recognises animal welfare as a public good – both can be maximised through the provision of a network of small abattoirs
- In their manifesto ahead of the last General Election, the Government pledged to end live exports for slaughter. The provision of a network of cost-effective local abattoirs will ensure that supply chain needs can be met. Additionally, the UK can continue to promote their high quality, safe meat produce on the global market, 'on the hook rather than on the hoof'.
- A recent FSA report pointed to livestock transport as having the most significant impact on animal welfare during the farm to slaughterhouse chain – whilst this isn't solely linked to journey duration, the provision of a network of local abattoirs will undoubtedly result in shorter journey times, improved welfare and improved carcass quality.
- Local abattoirs are critical to the safe processing of injured animals
- During the COVID-19 pandemic smaller abattoirs have increased production by 10% and the importance and resilience of short local meat supply chains is apparent
- Small, local abattoirs directly support local economies by providing employment
- Given the changing model of support for many upland farmers away from direct payments, profitability and sustainability can be achieved by the creation of value-added products through easy, affordable access to local abattoirs

- A circular economy approach should be taken to animal by-products, with all parts of the animal used, value added back to hides and skins, and alternative uses for waste, such as composting, explored.
- The UK Government has set out its vision for the future of farming often using the term “farm to fork” and addressing the issues of climate change, biodiversity decline, loss of soil fertility and public health. There has been a call for a transition to more sustainable methods of production which includes more mixed farming systems using grazing livestock as an important part of natural soil fertility building. Those farmers producing native breeds and using outdoor reared, pasture fed systems which have higher nutritional value and do not rely on imported grain feeds are more likely to need small abattoirs.
- The Government supports the a circular economy around waste and small abattoirs are well placed to ensure meat production is sustainable and that Animal By-Products are used in positive ways such as other small businesses including local tanneries or petfood production as well as composting or using for renewal energy.

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