

# SLAUGHTER: THEIR LAST MOMENTS

**Over a billion farmed animals in Britain are killed each year in slaughterhouses. In 2016, government statistics show that over 850,000 pigs [DEFRA, 2016] were slaughtered in one month alone and 74 million broiler chickens [DEFRA, 2016a]. Each year, over 40 million so-called ‘spent’ hens are also killed [HSA, 2014]. Other animals killed in their masses for human consumption are turkeys, ducks, fish, cows and goats. Make no mistake, this is mass murder on a staggering scale.**

The majority of animals killed in slaughterhouses across Britain are young. In fact many are just babies. Piglets are just six months old when they are sent to their deaths and ‘meat’ chickens six weeks. Male dairy calves are shot on-farm at just one or two days old [Viva! 2016]. Every person who chooses to eat meat, eggs or dairy are complicit in the deaths of thousands of baby animals in their lifetime.

Not only the young go to slaughter, but also the unborn and the pregnant. Viva! has reported on the killing of 150,000 pregnant cows a year and, in 2017, an investigation in Scotland found that animals were still being slaughtered whilst heavily pregnant [Wasley, 2017].

Many consumers like to imagine the killing process to be a sanitised, humane affair. Yet death at the slaughterhouse is invariably brutal and violent. A high throughput poultry abattoir can kill 9,000 animals an hour, and each of these animals will have felt shock, pain, and fear beforehand. Animals suffer at markets, during handling, transport, pre-slaughter penning (lairage), and in their final moments.

Slaughter in Britain is governed by the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations (WaToK) 2015, which enacts Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing but this does little to protect animals. Crustaceans are not even covered by WaToK and can be boiled alive. The concept of ‘humane slaughter’ is supposedly at the core of animal welfare legislation, yet this is a myth.

## **How Is Slaughter ‘Humane’?**

*Simple answer, it isn't.* Scientific evidence increasingly supports common sense. Yet the science is ignored by the farming sector. Current and perfectly legal methods of slaughter are grossly inhumane. Non-human animals, particularly mammals, have brain structures similar to us. But *all* animals – be they fish, birds or mammals – have the capacity to suffer just like we do.

Transport alone contributes significantly to poor animal welfare [FAO 2001]. Problems en route include stress, bruising, trampling, suffocation, heart failure, heat stroke, dehydration, exhaustion, injuries and fighting. Animals obviously also become distressed when subjected to rough handling during loading and unloading, and stunning and/or slaughter.

Upon reaching the slaughterhouse, animals can easily become scared at their unfamiliar environments. Behavioural responses are species-specific. For example

cows have a wide angle of vision and pigs react badly to being pushed down single-file 'races'. Moving items (eg dangling chains), noise and strange smells also increase stress levels.

### **Stunning and Slaughter**

Tens of millions of animals a year are being ineffectively stunned – by electricity (sheep and pigs), captive bolt guns (cows), electrical water baths (shackled birds) and gas - inside slaughterhouses. As a result they regain consciousness and can experience shock, fear and pain whilst bleeding to death.

Stunning with high concentrations of CO<sup>2</sup> is a serious welfare problem because it irritates the respiratory tract. Research has shown that pigs are highly averse to CO<sup>2</sup>, yet these animals continue to be commonly gassed in the UK. Gassing is promoted as 'humane' by the farming industry, despite scientific evidence showing otherwise.

Around 29 per cent of birds in Britain today continue to endure terrifying and painful leg shackling and electrical water bath stunning followed by neck-cutting, despite this being yet another practice acknowledged by scientists (and the government's own advisory body - Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC)) as being inhumane. Millions of birds, many of whom will already have leg injuries, suffer as they are hung up on fast moving shackles and dipped into electric water. Large slaughterhouses typically run lines at a rate of 185 to 195 birds a minute, or nearly 12,000 an hour. It is virtually impossible for workers to handle the birds with care, and many go on to have their necks cut whilst still fully or partially conscious.

***In 2009, FAWC stated: "Current systems of pre-slaughter inversion and shackling for poultry should be phased out" [FAWC, 2009].***

Undercover investigations have revealed horrific abuse inside slaughterhouses. Animals are hit, thrown, slapped, punched and have their body parts pulled by workers.

Slaughter can be carried out by several ways: bleeding (where both arteries are severed and usually following stunning), controlled atmosphere killing (causing suffocation), grinding up (still permitted for male baby chicks in hatcheries), and neck dislocation.

### **RELIGIOUS SLAUGHTER**

In Britain, WaToK require that all animals are stunned before slaughter (though as we know, this isn't always the case). An exemption is the Jewish method (shechita), and halal for Muslims. To be consistent with both, the animal must still be alive at the time of throat cutting. The shechita method does not allow pre-slaughter stunning at all though some animals are stunned using the halal method. However, in 2011, Viva! made the government aware that effective stunning was not being employed in some British halal slaughterhouses – in other words, animals may only have been stunned to immobilise, yet remained sensible to pain. Scientific data, and the British Veterinary Association, have stated that calves do feel pain when slaughtered according to Jewish and Muslim religious law without stunning [British Veterinary Association, 2015].

There is no requirement under UK or EU law for the meat from animals slaughtered without stunning to be labelled as such. So British consumers really have no idea where 'their' meat comes from.

However, regardless of the method it is important to remember that 'humane slaughter' does not exist. There is inherent pain and suffering in every slaughterhouse. If you want to end it the answer is easy. Go vegan – or at least take steps in that direction.

Try Viva!'s 30 Day Vegan for FREE: [www.viva.org.uk/30dayvegan](http://www.viva.org.uk/30dayvegan).

For more information on how you can get involved in the campaign to help end the suffering of farmed animals visit [www.viva.org.uk](http://www.viva.org.uk) or phone 0117 944 1000.

## REFERENCES

- British Veterinary Association. 2015. Slaughter without stunning and food labelling. [online] Available at: [www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News,\\_campaigns\\_and\\_policies/Campaigns/welfare-at-slaughter-june-2015-final3.pdf](http://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News,_campaigns_and_policies/Campaigns/welfare-at-slaughter-june-2015-final3.pdf) [Accessed 03 May 2017]
- DEFRA. 2016. United Kingdom Slaughter Statistics – June 2016. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [online] Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/546546/slaughter-statsnotice-14jul16.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/546546/slaughter-statsnotice-14jul16.pdf) [Accessed 03 May 2017]
- DEFRA. 2016a. United Kingdom Poultry and Poultry Meat Statistics – August 2016. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [online] Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/561335/poultry-statsnotice-22sep16b.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561335/poultry-statsnotice-22sep16b.pdf) [Accessed 03 May 2017]
- FAO. 2001. Guidelines for humane handling, transport and slaughter of livestock. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. [online] Available at: [www.fao.org/3/a-x6909e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-x6909e.pdf) [Accessed 03 May 2017]
- FAWC. 2009. Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing – Part Two: White Meat Animals. Farm Animal Welfare Council. [online] Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/325045/FAWC\\_report\\_on\\_the\\_welfare\\_of\\_farmed\\_animals\\_a\\_slaughter\\_or\\_killing\\_part\\_two\\_white\\_meat\\_species.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/325045/FAWC_report_on_the_welfare_of_farmed_animals_a_slaughter_or_killing_part_two_white_meat_species.pdf) [Accessed 03 May 2016]
- Humane Slaughter Association. 2014. A Fowl End? Humane Slaughter Association [online] Available at: [www.hsa.org.uk/downloads/related-items/poultry-slaughter.pdf](http://www.hsa.org.uk/downloads/related-items/poultry-slaughter.pdf) [Accessed 03 May 2017]
- Viva! 2016. Are you a baby eater? [online] Available at: [www.viva.org.uk/resources/campaign-materials/posters/are-you-baby-eater](http://www.viva.org.uk/resources/campaign-materials/posters/are-you-baby-eater) [Accessed 03 May 2017]
- Viva! 2016a. Pregnant cow massacre. [online] Available at: [www.viva.org.uk/what-we-do/pregnant-cow-massacre/pregnant-cow-massacre](http://www.viva.org.uk/what-we-do/pregnant-cow-massacre/pregnant-cow-massacre) [Accessed 03 May 2017]
- Wasley A. 2017. 'A national disgrace': Catalogue of animal suffering at Scottish abattoirs revealed. Bureau of Investigative Journalism. [online] Available at: [www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-04-19/thousands-of-scottish-farm-animals-have-suffered-cruelty-or-neglect-before-slaughter](http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-04-19/thousands-of-scottish-farm-animals-have-suffered-cruelty-or-neglect-before-slaughter) [Accessed 03 May 2017]