

# News & Reports

## Non-stun meat exports on the rise

By Josh Loeb

MEAT exports from sheep killed by non-stun slaughter are rising, according to the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The agency estimates around 32 per cent of all non-stun sheep meat produced in English and Welsh abattoirs is exported. In 2018 that figure was 24 per cent (VR, 23 February 2019, vol 184, p 234).

The FSA's estimate is based on the results of a survey of abattoirs carried out in the week commencing 7 March this year.

If accurate, it means around 800,000 sheep are now being killed annually by non-stun slaughter in England and Wales in order for their meat to be exported outside of the UK. All UK exports of non-stun sheep meat are 'non-stun halal', according to the FSA.

The figures come from a report, 'Results of the 2022 FSA Slaughter Sector Survey in England and Wales', published by Defra.

The BVA has said exporting non-stun meat runs contrary to the spirit of legislation, which generally prohibits non-stun slaughter but allows exemptions for meat intended for UK Muslims and Jews (see box).

While stunning renders animals 'unconscious and insensible to pain' before the neck is cut, animals that are not stunned are 'highly likely to suffer pain, suffering, and distress during the cut and bleeding', the association says.

Its president, Justine Shotton, said it was 'disappointing' that non-stun exports were increasing and 'more transparency' was needed to understand why.

She added: 'Ultimately, at the BVA we want to see an end to non-stun slaughter; however, where it is permitted the meat should only fulfil the demands of the domestic

religious communities it is intended to serve and should not be exported.'

While kosher meat is exclusively non-stun, halal meat can be stunned or non-stun, depending on the requirements of individual halal assurance schemes.

Most sheep slaughtered in the UK are stunned first, and most halal sheep meat consumed within the UK comes from animals stunned

before slaughter. However, most exported halal sheep meat comes from sheep that are not stunned.

Alongside information on exports, the FSA's report has prompted concerns that some meat from cattle slaughtered by shechita – the Jewish method of slaughter – may end up being sold on the general UK market without being labelled as kosher.

According to the FSA, during the week of its survey the carcasses of 51 per cent of all cows slaughtered by shechita were rejected as 'not meeting religious requirements' but were 'fit for wider consumption'. The corresponding figure for 2019 was 15 per cent.

When kosher authorities reject carcasses because of meat not meeting religious specifications, it may be sold on the general market, although the extent of this is unclear.

Megan Manson from the National Secular Society, which campaigns for a secular state, said it was 'disturbing' if over half of all cattle undergoing shechita slaughter did not end up on the kosher market.

Shechita UK, a Jewish organisation advocating for kosher production, says shechita is humane and that labelling of meat as simply 'stunned' or



'non-stunned' would be 'innately pejorative'.

As well as data on species considered kosher or halal, the FSA's report indicates that pigs, which are neither, are increasingly killed by high concentration carbon dioxide (a 'stun to kill' method), as opposed to being electrically stunned before slaughter, with 88 per cent stunned and killed this way in 2022, compared with 86 per cent in 2018. The RSPCA and Humane Slaughter Association say gas killing causes pigs unacceptable suffering. ●

**“  
More  
transparency  
is needed to  
understand  
why this is  
happening**”

### WHY THE RISE IN NON-STUN EXPORTS?

By law all livestock in the UK must be stunned before slaughter – except if the meat is for religious groups that do not accept stunning (in practice, that means observant Jews and some Muslims). The BVA has argued that this exemption was intended to allow meat to be provided for communities in the UK, not abroad. With data from the FSA indicating that exports of non-stun sheep meat are rising, the obvious question is: why? Destinations for the exports are unclear, but it is thought there has been an increase in trade with Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which the UK signed 'market access agreements' with ahead of Brexit. This theory is supported by data showing 2022 UK sheep meat exports to the EU down by half compared with 2018, with a concomitant rise in exports to non-EU countries.