



Sustainable Food Trust

A global voice for sustainable food and health

DRAFT

Continuing loss of small abattoirs threatens to destroy local meat marketing

Embargoed until 00.01am Monday 26 February 2018

Not to go online before 19.30 HOURS Sunday 25 February

A new report from the Sustainable Food Trust (SFT) finds that the UK's network of small local abattoirs is near collapse. Without urgent action there will be a huge loss of consumer choice because the marketing of locally-produced, traceable meat will no longer be possible in many parts of the country, due to the high cost of transporting relatively small numbers of farm animals long distances. [1]

Over the last decade more than a third of small abattoirs have closed. In England there are just 63 small abattoirs left, down from 96 in 2007. Two further small abattoirs have already closed this year in Scotland. In total the number of all red meat abattoirs has fallen to 249 from 320 in 2007 and almost 1,900 in 1970. Many of these, however, are unsuitable for local meat marketing. [2]

The reasons for the continuing closures include the disproportionately high burden of regulation imposed on small abattoirs, falling cattle numbers nationally and the current very low and often negative profitability of the sector due to the increasing dominance of the supermarkets. [3a., b. and c.]

The SFT is calling on the Government to:

- Make a clear statement of support that it recognizes the vital importance of small abattoir, and this a make a matter of practical policy across all government departments and agencies;
- Work constructively with interested parties to make possible the use of mobile and small static red meat abattoirs for on-farm slaughtering;
- Set up a task force with joint government, industry and consumer representation, to establish why small abattoirs are closing and propose innovative and practical solutions to ensure their survival.

The ideal for many producer-retailers would be a mobile abattoir which comes to their farm periodically. A number of countries within the EU and also Canada, New Zealand and America currently have mobile abattoirs successfully operating within tight regulatory regimes that enhance animal welfare and bio-security. The SFT believes mobile abattoirs would have advantages for animal welfare and could become viable in the UK, with constructive government and regulatory engagement.

Richard Young, policy director of the SFT and a co-author of the report said, “Local abattoirs play a vital role in all rural communities where farm animals are kept. When they close, both animals and meat have to be transported much further. This is bad for animal welfare and bad for the environment. It also threatens the ongoing renaissance of local food cultures.

On my own organic farm, I have had to change abattoirs nine times over the last 30 years in order to keep our farm shop supplied with the meat from our own animals, as seven of those closest to me have closed and two became unsuitable for other reasons. I now have to take our animals almost 40 miles to get them slaughtered and it costs a great deal to get the carcasses delivered back to our shop.”

Phil Stocker, chief executive of the National Sheep Association said, “This timely report draws attention to the rapidly changing and complex crisis facing smaller local abattoirs and those who depend on them. I truly hope that government and industry will work together to offer a long-term future for our diminishing network of local abattoirs before it is too late”.

Peter Stevenson, chief policy advisor, Compassion in World Farming said, “For several decades we have witnessed the gradual erosion of the UK’s network of small local abattoirs. Farmers who want to minimise travelling times have been unable to prevent their animals being taken on longer journeys to distant slaughterhouses as local facilities disappear. This is clearly not in the best interest of the animals’ welfare. Government must act to help reinstate local abattoirs. Eating food produced locally and supporting local farmers and businesses are rightly viewed as important aspects of sustainability.”

Small local abattoirs also provide a wide range of benefits for local communities. [4] The situation also provides poor value for taxpayer. The UK has invested heavily, through a range of different grant schemes, in encouraging farmers to diversify, and on-farm retailing of meat has been one of the major options taken up. However, despite the considerable investment of public money that has been made, the government has taken little effective action to prevent the ongoing closure of local abattoirs, on which the local marketing of meat depends.

The report, [A Good Life and a Good Death - Relocalising farm animal slaughter](#) is published on 26 February 2018

ENDS

For further information contact:

Megan Perry: megan@sustainablefoodtrust.org ;	07761 804341
Bonnie Welch: bonnie@sustainablefoodtrust.org ;	07745 938640
Richard Young: richard@sustainablefoodtrust.org ;	07919 194235
Bob Kennard: bobkennard51@gmail.com ;	07415 855300
For information on mobile abattoirs:	
Paddy Hoare: paddy@perdixpartnership.co.uk	07855 392628

Notes for Editors

[1] Although some local producers are still within reasonable travelling distance of an abattoir which will slaughter livestock for individual farmers others are forced to take their animals further every time a local abattoir closes. Some of the most extreme examples relate to Orkney which no longer has an abattoir and the Isle of Skye where despite strong local interest it has not proved financially viable to build an abattoir. But even in England many producers now have to take their animals 60 miles or more to get them slaughtered.

[2] Many larger abattoirs are not willing or able to slaughter animals for farmers and return the carcasses to their farm shops or local butchers. Others are unsuitable for producer-retailers because they slaughter animals without pre-stunning for a specific sector of the Halal meat trade. In addition, less than a quarter of abattoirs are certified for slaughtering organic animals.

[3] a. As with many small businesses, the burden of paperwork and regulation poses a greater administrative burden on small abattoirs than on large ones, but the regulation was predominantly drawn up with large abattoirs in mind and much of it is unnecessary or inappropriate for small abattoirs.

[3] b. Supermarkets are supplied by the largest abattoirs which can slaughter very large numbers of animals each day. Many of these were built with the aid of substantial grants. The 2 Sisters slaughterhouse near Merthyr Tydfil, which supplies Tesco, was opened in 1999 and built and equipped with the aid of almost £8 million pounds in grants, worth over £13 million pounds in today's money. This has resulted in over-capacity in the slaughtering sector and this is creating strong competition between slaughterhouses with price under-cutting and cattle and sheep transported from all over Wales, Scotland and England to supply this abattoir in South Wales. What is happening in the meat sectors is very similar to what has happened with milk in recent years. Supermarket price wars have forced slaughterhouses to undercut one another, and economies of scale have allowed the largest to increase market share at the expense of the smallest.

[3] c. There has also been a large amount of vertical integration, with some large meat companies buying up hides and skin companies. It is not yet clear however, if this is a reason for the very low prices currently to small abattoirs for hides and skins.

[4] Smaller local abattoirs also provide skilled local jobs and are a catalyst for other related businesses, helping to keep the added financial returns from meat processing within local rural communities; and providing opportunities for the sons and daughters of local livestock farmers to increase income for a family farm which might otherwise be forced out of business.