

Home slaughter for private consumption

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Note: although the United Kingdom has left the European Union, certain pieces of legislation (formally known as 'retained EU law') will still apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation; this means that you will still see references to EU regulations in our guidance.

This guidance is for England

The term 'home slaughter' has a specific definition. If you are planning on slaughtering your own livestock on-farm, there are welfare implications if you do not have the necessary skills, equipment and competency to do so.

On-farm slaughter of any livestock is an extremely difficult option to achieve legally in terms of food hygiene and transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (such as BSE) controls, and in terms of application of humane methods of restraint, stunning and slaughter. You need to ensure that you dispose of the carcase and any animal waste in accordance with the Regulations.

Definition of home slaughter

Home slaughter means the slaughter of a livestock animal by the animal's owner, on their property, for their own personal consumption or that of members of their immediate family living there.

Home slaughter does not take place in an approved slaughterhouse. Carcases or parts of carcases from home-slaughtered livestock, excluding those being disposed of as animal by-products, cannot be removed to another premises for processing.

Is this different to private slaughter in an approved slaughterhouse?

Yes. This is when the owner of the animal sends it to an approved slaughterhouse to be slaughtered and the carcass is returned to the owner.

Slaughter outside a licensed slaughterhouse

Regulation (EC) 853/2004 *laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin* states that in most cases meat for human consumption must be from animals slaughtered in an approved slaughterhouse (an approved slaughterhouse could include a licensed mobile slaughterhouse) where slaughter is, amongst other things, subject to inspection and verification by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). A full list of meat establishments that are approved to slaughter livestock and/or cut meat can be found on the FSA website; contact details for those wanting further information about approved meat establishments across the UK are also available by following this link.

The FSA advises that advance notice of any home slaughter should be given to the local authority animal health and welfare team, nearest to where the farm is located. If for some reason this is not possible, then notification should take place within five days following the slaughter of the animal. Contact details for your local authority can be found on the GOV.UK website.

If you are not prepared to carry out the slaughter process yourself, then you can employ a licensed slaughterer to kill and dress the animal(s) on-farm, under your supervision and responsibility.

It is unlawful to have the animal slaughtered anywhere away from your property, other than in an approved slaughterhouse.

Under Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 it is an offence to sell, or to supply to another person, meat that has not been slaughtered and health-marked in a licensed abattoir. It is for this reason that meat that has been slaughtered on-farm can only be consumed by the owner and their immediate family.

Can I slaughter the animals myself?

You may only do this if you have the necessary skills and training to ensure that you slaughter the animals humanely. Also you need to have the necessary equipment and be sure that you can use it competently.

It is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal.

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Regulations 2015 and Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 *on the protection of animals at the time of killing* create offences for failing to comply with provisions relating to restraining, stunning and killing. Unless you are using a firearm to kill pigs, sheep, goats, deer or cattle, you must restrain them. The Regulations also make it an offence to cause or permit any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal or bird during the slaughter or killing process.

Under these Regulations, religious slaughter is only permitted in approved slaughterhouses, as all on-farm kills must be stunned before bleeding.

More information on the legal requirements you will need to comply with for home slaughter can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Do I need a slaughter licence?

A slaughter licence is not needed when slaughtering your own animal for your own consumption or consumption by your immediate family who live with you. However, certain operations both in slaughterhouses and when carried out on farms for the purpose of killing animals require a certificate of competence (CoC).

If you employ an itinerant slaughterer, they must hold a certificate of competence or a licence for the relevant activities, which indicates that they have the knowledge and skill necessary to perform the tasks humanely and efficiently.

Further information on when a CoC is required and how to obtain one can be found on GOV.UK website.

Disposal of the carcase and waste material

Animal by-products must be disposed of in accordance with the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013. This is all slaughter waste not destined for human consumption or classed as specified risk material (SRM), including the horns, hides, hooves and blood.

The routes available for the disposal and use of animal by-products vary with the category and are listed in articles 12, 13 and 14 of Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009 *laying down health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption (Animal by-products Regulation)*. In general, the higher the risk category the fewer are the options for use.

The owner must stain, store, dispose of, etc the SRM in accordance with the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2018. Definitions of SRM will depend on the age of the animal being slaughtered.

The spinal column must not be split. It must be removed whole and disposed of as SRM.

Specific information for cattle and sheep

See 'Home slaughter of cattle' and 'Home slaughter of sheep'.

Further information

Further guidance on home slaughter can be found on the Food Standards Agency website.

Trading standards

For more information on the work of trading standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

Key legislation

Food Safety Act 1990

Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 *laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin*

Animal Welfare Act 2006

Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009 *laying down health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption (Animal by-products Regulation)*

Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 *on the protection of animals at the time of killing*

Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013

Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013

Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2018

Last reviewed / updated: December 2021

In this update

No major changes

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab.

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