

Home slaughter of sheep

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Although the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) in 2021, certain pieces of legislation (known as 'assimilated law') continue to apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation, revoked or permitted to expire. This means that our guidance still contains references to legislation that originated from the EU.

This guidance is for England

Whether or not an owner is permitted to kill sheep for private consumption depends on whether the slaughter takes place outside or inside a licensed slaughterhouse.

There are two lawful ways to have your animals slaughtered and prepared for your own consumption: in an approved slaughterhouse, or on your farm for your own private consumption or that of immediate family living there.

On-farm slaughter of any livestock is an extremely difficult option to achieve legally in terms of food hygiene and transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) controls, as well as in terms of the 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.

Slaughter outside a licensed slaughterhouse

Assimilated 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 assimilated 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 sheep myself?

It is lawful for your sheep to be slaughtered on your farm by you, as long as you observe certain requirements.

You must have the necessary skills and training to ensure that you treat 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 assimilated 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 your sheep, you must restrain them without causing them pain, suffering or distress. The Regulations also make it an offence to cause or permit any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal 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.

Detailed information relating to the [practical considerations of captive bolt stunning](#), equipment, restraint, and bleeding and pithing can be found on the Humane Slaughter Association website. Information on the [humane killing of livestock using firearms](#) is also available.

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 require a certificate of competence (CoC), both in slaughterhouses and when carried out on farms for the purpose of killing animals.

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 the GOV.UK website.

Disposal of 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. (See also '[Fallen stock and the disposal of animal by-products](#)'.)

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

The carcase or any product of animal origin must not be offered for sale or otherwise to a third party or the public, which includes giving away to friends, relatives, etc. If the carcase is to be sold, given away, etc, the rules for slaughter on-farm do not apply; a licensed slaughterhouse must always be used.

The sheep must be free of veterinary medicine residues.

Specified risk material

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:

- **sheep under 12 months.** No SRM
- **sheep over 12 months** (or permanent incisor erupted or aged over 12 months as estimated by a method approved by the FSA). Skull (including the brain and eyes but not including the horns) and spinal cord

Further information

For more detail on home slaughter of livestock generally, please see '[Home slaughter for private consumption](#)'.

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](#)'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: April 2024

Key legislation

- [Food Safety Act 1990](#)
- [assimilated Regulation \(EC\) No 853/2004](#) *laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin*
- [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#)
- [assimilated 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)*
- [assimilated 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](#)

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 changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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