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trading standards law explained

Home slaughter for private consumption

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

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 Scotland

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 (TSE) controls, as well as in terms of the application of humane methods of restraint, stunning and other operations related to the 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.

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 carcase is returned to the owner.

Slaughter outside a licensed slaughterhouse

Assimilated Regulation (EC) No 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). A list of meat establishments that are approved to slaughter livestock and/or cut meat can be found on the Food Standards Scotland (FSS) website, and a full list for the rest of the UK can be found on the Food Standards Agency (FSA) website. Contact details for those wanting further information about approved meat establishments across the UK are also available by following the links.

The FSS advises that advance notice of any home slaughter should be given to whichever local authority Animal Health and Welfare team is 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 must use a person who holds a certificate of competence (CoC). The slaughterer must perform the slaughter under your responsibility and supervision.

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 (even if there is no exchange of money), 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?

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

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 Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal.

The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 and the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (which implement additional requirements of assimilated Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 *on the protection of animals at the time of killing*), 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.

Detailed information relating to the practical considerations of captive bolt stunning, including 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 CoC, both in slaughterhouses and when carried out on farms for the purpose of killing animals. A WATOK licence is required if you handle, stun or slaughter animals outside a slaughterhouse as part of your commercial business.

For example, a CoC is needed when:

- You kill animals for other people
- Killing animals by free bullet
- Using a captive-bolt instrument, unless it is an emergency

If you employ an itinerant slaughterer, they must hold a CoC or a licence for the relevant activities, which indicates that they have the knowledge and skill necessary to perform the tasks humanely and efficiently. If you need to check the holder of the CoC, please email WATOK@fss.scot

If you have a CoC issued in a UK country, you can use it in any of the other UK countries for the appropriate procedures, equipment and animals.

Guidance on certificates of competence can be found on the FSS website.

Disposal of the carcase and waste material

Animal by-products must be disposed of in accordance with the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (Scotland) Regulations 2013. This is all slaughter waste, including the horns, hides, hooves and blood, that is either or both:

- Not destined for human consumption
- Classed as specified risk material (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 routes available for the disposal and use of animal by-products vary by category. In general, the higher the risk category, the fewer are the options for use. More information on categories and disposal is available on the GOV.UK website.

See also 'Fallen stock and the disposal of animal by-products'.

Specified risk material

For cattle, sheep and goats, the owner must stain, store, dispose of, etc the SRM in accordance with the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (Scotland) Regulations 2010.

Definitions of SRM depend on the age of the animal being slaughtered:

- **Cattle of all ages.** The tonsils, the last four metres of small intestine, the caecum and the mesentery
- **Cattle aged over 12 months.** The spinal cord and the skull, including the brain and eyes but excluding the mandible
- **Cattle aged over 30 months.** The vertebral column, including the dorsal root ganglia but excluding the:
    - Vertebrae of the tail
    - Spinous and transverse processes of the cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebrae
    - Median sacral crest
    - Wings of the sacrum
- **Sheep and goats aged 12 months or less.** No SRM
- **Sheep and goats aged over 12 months, or permanent incisor erupted, or aged over 12 months as estimated by a method approved by the FSS.** The spinal cord and the skull, including the brain and eyes but excluding the horns

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

Extra requirements for home slaughter of cattle

Age of the cattle

Born before 1 August 1996

Cattle born before 1 August 1996 in the UK do not have passports, only certificates of registration, and they must not be slaughtered for human consumption. All cattle of this age have been restricted under the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (Scotland) Regulations 2010 to the premises where they were located due to the consequent TSE risk.

Keepers of these cattle have been issued with restriction notices detailing the affected animals. Keepers wishing to move such animals must submit a movement licence application form, completed by both parties involved in the movement, to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) One Health Customer Service Centre in Worcester. If you need help completing the form, please contact APHA.

Further information on cattle without passports can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Born since 1 August 1996

Cattle born on or after 1 August 1996 can be slaughtered for private consumption whether they have a cattle passport or not.

If an animal does not have a cattle passport, the keeper must notify its death (usually to ScotEID in writing within seven days, and include the ear tag number, the date of death and the holding on which it died.

Slaughter in a licensed slaughterhouse can only be carried out if there is a valid cattle passport for the beast.

Wherever cattle are slaughtered, cattle passports should be returned as normal following the death of the animal.

BSE testing

A person who has in their possession or under their control the body of a bovine animal that needs to be tested for BSE must, within 24 hours, either:

- Make arrangements with another person for that person to collect it and to deliver it to an approved sampling site within 72 hours
  or
- Identify an approved sampling site that will carry out the sampling and deliver the animal to that site so as to arrive at the site within 72 hours

If the head of the animal requires testing, the rest must be treated as SRM (see above).

Healthy cattle that were born in Romania or Bulgaria, and were over 30 months old when slaughtered for food, need to be tested for BSE. This does not apply to healthy cattle born in any other EU Member State or the UK.

The following cattle must also test negative for BSE prior to consumption of the meat:

- Healthy cattle, born in any non-EU country other than the UK, and aged over 30 months when slaughtered for human consumption
- Emergency-slaughter cattle (that is, an otherwise healthy animal that has suffered an accident that prevented its transport to the slaughterhouse), aged over 48 months
- Emergency-slaughter cattle, aged over 24 months, and born in Romania, Bulgaria or any non-EU country other than the UK

Cattle requiring BSE testing must test negative before consumption. Meat from the animal should only be consumed if the BSE test is negative. If the test is positive, the carcase and all parts of the body must be disposed of as a category 1 animal by-product.

For more information on testing, see 'BSE testing of cattle'.

Further information

Further guidance on home slaughter can be found on the FSS 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 2026

Key legislation

- Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995
- Assimilated Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 *laying down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of certain transmissible spongiform encephalopathies*
- Assimilated Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 *laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin*
- Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006
- Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 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*
- Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (Scotland) Regulations 2010
- Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Scotland) Regulations 2012
- Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (Scotland) Regulations 2013

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 go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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