

Home slaughter of cattle

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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 Scotland

Whether or not an owner is permitted to kill cattle for private consumption depends on the cattle's date of birth, whether it has a valid cattle passport, and 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 by you 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.

When were 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 may 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 APHA One Health Customer Service Centre in Worcester. If you need help completing the form please contact [APHA](#).

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.

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, but not an itinerant slaughterman). A [list of meat establishments that are approved in Scotland 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.

At present it is the FSS's policy that you are not able to use an itinerant slaughterman to kill animals at your farm. It would also be unlawful to have the animal slaughtered anywhere else 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 cattle myself?

It is lawful for your cattle 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 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, the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Scotland) Regulations 2012 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 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 Scottish Government website.

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

Further information on [when a CoC is required and application forms](#) can be found on the Food Standards Scotland website.

BSE testing requirements

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

The head of the animal requires testing and the rest must be treated as specified risk material (SRM - see below).

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 carcass 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](#)'.

Disposal of 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 not destined for human consumption or classed as 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 carcass 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 carcass is to be sold, given away, etc, the rules for slaughter on-farm do not apply, a licensed slaughterhouse must always be used and a valid passport is always required.

The beast 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 (Scotland) Regulations 2010.

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

- **cattle of all ages.** The tonsils, the intestines, from the duodenum to the rectum, and the mesentery
- **cattle over 12 months of age.** The SRM is defined as the skull (including the brain and eyes), the tonsils and the spinal cord
- **cattle over 30 months of age.** The vertebral column, excluding the vertebrae of the tail, the spinous and transverse processes of the cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, the median sacral crest and the wings of the sacrum, but including the dorsal root ganglia

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 Scotland (FSS) website. The FSS is currently considering a policy revision to include the option for home slaughter and dressing to be carried out by a licensed slaughterman. The final policy decision may affect some of the advice included in this guide.

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

Updated ScotEID information.

Last reviewed / updated: March 2024

Key legislation

- [Welfare of Animals \(Slaughter or Killing\) Regulations 1995](#)
- [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](#)
- [Cattle Identification \(Scotland\) Regulations 2007](#)
- [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 often only shows 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.

<https://www.businesscompanion.info/en/quick-guides/animals-and-agriculture/home-slaughter-of-cattle-s>