

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all.

By the time that this edition drops through your door the new regime with regards to the visual inspection of pigs will be well and truly under way. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) asked the various stakeholders as to their opinion on the rectification of red offals on pigs and it was the Council's opinion that this task was probably best left with the Meat Hygiene Inspector (MHI). This was considered to be the pragmatic solution due to the difficulty in marking red offals, particularly where more than one rejection condition might be present. The FSA concurred with this opinion and, for the foreseeable future it would appear that the status quo will remain.

The FSA have requested feedback from MHI's involved in pig inspection and also from the stakeholders, so that an assessment can be made as to how the new system is working. I would encourage all members to actively participate, with both positive feedback and the negative, so that an accurate assessment might be taken. It would be useful if you could drop me a line and let me know your thoughts as well.

Regulation 882

The AMI responded to the consultation on the amendments regulation 882, the main point that we wished to see included being the words 'wholesome' and 'wholesomeness' as and where appropriate, as the Council felt that this was probably best understood by the great British public.

Subscription Increase

At the AGM in April it was agreed that annual subscription to the AMI needed to be increased; the first raise in six years!!! From the 1st of January full membership will be £80 and retired/student membership will be £30.

Seminar

Seminar this year is again in what some have called the spiritual home of Seminar, at Harper Adams University, over the weekend of 5th-6th September.

We have endeavoured to include some more subjects on pathology/parasitology and I am particularly looking forward to the papers on Hydatidosis and PDNS.

I hope to catch up with the familiar faces there and hopefully many new ones too.

Those of you who have been and know the format, perhaps you could encourage your colleagues to 'give it a go'. I can assure you that the social side of the event can be pretty lively.

Religious Slaughter

There has been much debate recently on the subject of religious slaughter, in all forms of media. I was struck by the lack of understanding by many of the 'guests' on radio shows and by the 'posts' on various internet forums. I have heard things stated as fact such as; 'it is more hygienic', 'more blood is drained' and 'the animal is hung up and its throat is cut'. Clearly, the subject is not entirely understood by, I would suggest, the majority of those people who have taken the time to comment, so perhaps it is necessary to issue a definitive guide as to what happens. Previous programmes on the television, when sympathetically presented have been very well received and have served to educate rather than sensationalise.

Letter to the editor

I read, and re-read, with interest the second letter to the editor in the last issue of the Meat Hygienist (TMH). Contrary to some opinion, I do not have any input into the content of TMH other than what goes into my report, and whereas I am all in favour of free speech and providing a platform to facilitate this, there are a couple of points in this letter that I feel need to be addressed.

I agree that more micro-biological testing is a good thing, though dealing with some of the issues that arise, particularly *Campylobacter* have thus far proved somewhat problematic. However, I also agree that meat inspection in the traditional understanding i.e. carried out by an independent, suitably qualified person in an impartial manner and given adequate time and facilities to do so, is equally important, and is probably what the general public might reasonably expect of the Competent Authority. Confidence in the product is of paramount importance, as with

any other retailed product and I am of the opinion that meat inspection in a 'traditional' manner goes a long way to providing this.

What I do not agree with is that there is any way a 'conspiracy' to get rid of meat inspectors.

It has been acknowledged by the Food Standards Agency that that a large part of the meat inspection work force is an 'aging' entity and, that if not addressed in the fairly near future, there is a very real risk of the knowledge base that currently exists being lost. The FSA have indicated that a new intake of trainee meat hygiene inspectors is in the pipeline and that the application criteria has been adjusted to better facilitate the applications from people currently working in the industry. People much like myself when I applied back in 1997.

So, it's over to the FSA on that score.

I would also urge caution when stating that that 'TB can kill'. We are all aware that *Mycobacterium Tuberculosis* can run rampant in the right conditions such as poor quality housing and cramped conditions but when we talk about meat inspection, we are then considering *M. Bovis*, *M. Avium/Intracellulare* or *M. Hominosuis*. Any Veterinarian or micro biological scientist will be quick to remind you that there is no evidence of any human contracting TB through the ingestion of infected meat. That said, I am confident in stating that the great British public would be extremely averse to the very idea of consuming such meat. During the course of inspection, I constantly bear such things in mind and maintain my diligence mindful of this fact, even though the consumer probably gives no real thought as to what

we do. I always presume that they would expect me to act in their own best interests.

Secondly, to state that 'visual only can kill' is a sweeping generalisation that, in my view, is an ill-advised statement. As anyone attending last years Seminar will attest, I was one of the first in the queue to speak out against going down the visual inspection route, believing this not to be in the best interests of the consumer, nor of industry should any confidence in the product be lost. But the fact of the matter is that this has been passed in to legislation at an EU level. The professional way to proceed is to carry out the job in the manner of our paymasters bidding and provide accurate and constructive feedback as to the benefits and any faults of the new methodology.

I was once told by an MEP that, 'sometimes, public opinion outweighs scientific evidence' and maybe, in time, this could be a case in point. But the politicians have gone through due process and we are where we are, so the new system must be given a chance to succeed, or otherwise, on its own merits. I am confident that if it is not as successful as the scientists declare that it will be, then it will not be down to any shortcomings by the MHI's.

As to the statement that poultry rejections have dropped in those plants that no longer use PMI's I am in no position to comment as I am not privy to those figures.

Perhaps the author of the letter would care to drop me a line, in the strictest confidence and I will pose the questions directly.

To end this piece, I do most whole heartedly agree that if independent meat inspection should ever disappear, this would be a disaster for the public, and quite possibly the industry too. History would indicate this

and some text books give an indication to some of the dubious practices that have occurred in the past.

We know too, that some 'third countries' are insisting upon 'traditional' meat inspection to allow export in to those countries and I think it would be folly to in any way jeopardise these emerging and expanding markets.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson