

**General Secretary's
Report**



Hello to you all.

First off, I have to apologise for the late issue(s) of your Meat Hygienist. This has been due to technical difficulties during production but were determined to try and get to you every copy that is due.

Normally, I would have wished you all a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year

prior to it happening, but this year I am going to have to do this in retrospect.

The Association's national annual general meeting has also been held, this year in Scotland, at the Kings Manor Hotel in Edinburgh on Saturday 18th April.

Unfortunately, the technical issues meant that only our Scottish members were in attendance as day delegates, but it was good to see the 'stalwarts' of the Association there.

At the end of 2014, the FSA published figures outlining the levels of Campylobacter in poultry supplied by the

major retailers in the UK. It was interesting to note that this action drew criticism from the poultry industry and praise from the consumer organisations, which I guess is pretty much what might reasonably have been expected. It is the opinion of the national council that this information to the public was both timely and prudent, serving to highlight the risk, and the FSA went on to provide guidelines on how to minimise this risk in the domestic setting, most notably the folly of washing poultry prior to cooking. However, I do agree with the observations from industry that the consumer also has an obligation to take all

reasonable precautions and the Association has long advocated the need for some sort of domestic science teaching in schools to provide the basics. This appears to have been noted by the FSA and although I am sure that the FSA does not have the budget to provide this sort of education themselves, I feel sure that they are best placed to give this the sort of push that would be necessary for schools take it up. I do not believe that the Campylobacter problem will be solved by pushing in any one particular direction but by coming at it from a multitude of angles; bio-security on farms, hygienic production and processing, absolute

maintenance of the cold chain during transportation and storage, including, most importantly, at home, and by good hygienic practices in the kitchen.

I noted that the FSA stated that *Campylobacter* is reduced via the process of freezing, which was also widely covered in the national press, but I subsequently had friends of mine asking me if it was OK to store/defrost frozen poultry on the top shelf of their domestic fridges as apparently 'frozen poultry was a lot safer'. Unlike me, these are well educated, clever folk that you might have thought would have known better. If people like this are getting the wrong message then this is a point that I think

could use some clarification. I am confident that each and every member would be only too happy to inform their friends and family of the facts, but it might be useful if the FSA could issue some sort of clarification to be carried in the press as well.

It has come to light that at seminar last year, albeit in the bar in the evening and not in the actual seminar sessions themselves, that some delegates were making what were deemed by some observers, to be inappropriate comments that caused some offence. This may well have been due to the beer talking and

allowing some folks to relax to the point where they allowed their normal high standards to slip, but the fact is that it did cause offence to some and I would be failing if I did not address the matter.

Meat Hygiene

Inspectors are professional people and should behave as such, even in those 'unguarded' moments when 'slips of the tongue' might occur. This is particularly relevant with regards to Registered Meat Hygiene Inspectors, who have agreed to be bound by the code of conduct. This means that opinions that might be considered to be racist, sexist, discriminatory or disrespectful of colleagues within the

profession will not be tolerated

It is anticipated that, having addressed the situation via these pages, that the situation will not arise again.

On the 23rd February I watched with interest the debate in Westminster Hall on non-stun slaughter. This debate arose from an e-petition that achieved the mandatory 100,000 signatures that are necessary for such a debate to be considered. The debate was wide ranging, covering issues such as labelling, mis-stunning, systems used in other countries and possible ways forward in the UK. One subject

that received quite a lot of time was that of post cut stunning, a method used quite widely in varying forms across Europe. I was interested to learn that in some countries, post cut stunning is only utilised after a period of time has lapsed (i.e. 90 seconds for bovines in France) and if the animal is still showing signs of consciousness. In other countries, post cut stunning has to be carried out immediately, which is the method that springs to my mind whenever I hear it mentioned.

There was also some 'naivety' during the discussion and I did hear the opinion made that 'perhaps kosher hindquarters are discarded rather than

placed on sale in the general market'. Clearly that is not going to happen!!!

One expression that I constantly heard reference to was that of 'a surgically sharp knife', as though this was something unusual / special and unique to religious slaughter. It is my experience that slaughter personnel engaged in the actual slaughter of animals tend to keep their knives 'surgically sharp' as a matter of course. After all, it makes their job so much easier. I would suggest that if any one person engaged in slaughter is unable to maintain their knives in such a state of sharpness, then they are failing in one of the competencies required

to be doing the job and should be prevented from doing the task.

The question was also raised as to why the FSA had not been accurately recording the level of mis-stunning, and I believe that the reason is pretty clear; the question has never been asked. However, it has now, and MHI's and OV's are working together to make this happen. I would urge a little caution on this point however; I personally encourage slaughter personnel to re-stun if they have even the slightest doubt as to whether an animal is recovering. I mean, what are we really talking about here? Just the cost of a cartridge to remove the risk of criticism. I also remind them to

work 'as though they were being filmed' and in light of recent events, this approach is more prudent than it ever was.

Mandatory CCTV in abattoirs was also discussed during the parliamentary debate, with many members calling for this happen. I think that CCTV could well be a useful tool for Food Business Operators to demonstrate additional control over a process for which they are ultimately responsible, but I do think that it should be on a voluntary basis. Perhaps some FBO's are missing an opportunity to seize the initiative, though I am aware that others have already made this happen.

It was also noted that, in Germany, Local Authorities require FBO's wishing to carry out non-stun slaughter to notify them prior to it happening, and then they are only permitted to non-stun slaughter enough animals to supply the direct needs of the target market. Again, this was suggested as a possible way forward.

With a counter e-petition set up in support of non-stun slaughter already exceeding the mandatory 100,000 signatures required to provoke a debate in Westminster (124,000 on the day of this debate) it is quite clear that this is a subject that is set to be discussed at some length for some time to come.

It is a rule under the constitution of the AMI that, periodically, the boundaries for each division are reviewed. This year, the Council have discussed boundary changes, possibly in line with devolved boundaries within the UK, but dividing England into north and south divisions, due to the numbers of members.

It would throw up the question of how representatives to Council are selected, but this is also the case with other professional bodies such as the RCVS and the RSPH. In these cases I believe that officials are nominated and elected and I can see

no reason why a similar system cannot work within the AMI. It would appear to be the modern way to proceed and meetings could be held in various areas of the differing divisions, altering each time to allow members access according to where they live and which suits them best. E-mails and the website should allow members to keep up to date without too much difficulty and for those that do not have access to such facilities, good old fashioned land mail and the Meat Hygienist should suffice.

I would be very interested to hear the views of members on this matter. Is this a good idea? Or perhaps not?

Please feel free to e-mail me or, as this matter will be on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of Council. Your divisional secretary will be only too happy to take your views to Council.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson