

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all.

First off I must state the wholehearted thanks and appreciation of the Association to Bob Hancock, who stood down from the position as editor of the Meat Hygienist earlier in the year. Bob has done a sterling job for a number of years in what is one of the more challenging positions within the Association, and he departs with our thanks and very best wishes for his future endeavours.

This in turn leads me to welcome our new man to the position, Bill Strachan.

Living and working in Scotland, Bill is a long time member of the Association and an academic to boot. The Trustees feel that the Meat Hygienist has been passed on to another set of safe hands, and we look forward with eager anticipation to see which way Bill wishes to steer the Meat Hygienist.

As always, Bill would welcome letters and opinions from the membership and, if members can provide copy for inclusion then please drop him a line.

Animal Welfare

Following the covert filming of 'alleged' animal cruelty in a couple of abattoirs earlier this year, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) initiated unannounced visits to a number of approved premises across the country to ascertain the controls in place and the monitoring of those controls by the inspection teams in those premises. By and large, there were no serious problems in those plants visited except one where 'urgent improvement' was deemed necessary. The FSA have also made animal welfare a top priority and recently hosted a workshop on the subject at Fosse House in York. The Association was invited to attend this workshop, which we duly did, and it was a very positive event, with lots of good ideas coming out for discussion. These included the possibility of animal welfare 'champions', refresher training, CPD and progression mapping (a set course of actions to be taken given defined situations), amongst others.

It was acknowledged that Meat Hygiene Inspectors are, in many premises, somewhat under-utilised in the monitoring of animal welfare (AW). It was further acknowledged that AW falls firmly within the remit of MHI's, and that they and the OV's in plant should seek to actively work together to ensure that monitoring is effective and that any breaches of the regulations are identified and recorded.

This last point is important, as it creates a baseline from which further actions can be initiated if necessary. The workshop was informed that in some premises, there may be what is being termed as 'legitimate expectation' by some Food Business

Operators (FBO's). What this means is that some practices may have been permitted (or omitted) over a period of time to the point where it has been accepted as 'normal', moving sheep by the grasping of fleeces for example, or not having a back-up method of stunning (such as a spare captive bolt gun) in place and ready to use.

In such cases, the correct procedures and practices should be re-instated and deviations from this recorded.

The meeting received a video message from Catherine Brown, CEO of the FSA stating that full support will be forthcoming from the FSA management. She went on to state that, if any MHI or OV identified compromises of animal welfare to the point that they felt that stopping the line was justified, then that is what they should do and the management would be available to deal with any 'fallout'.

I think that this underlines the importance that FSA give to animal welfare at the abattoir and the Association of Meat Inspectors is fully supportive of the FSA in all aspects of the preservation and improvement of animal welfare.

The AMI was also represented at the Humane Slaughter Associations seminar on the Animal Welfare Officer (AWO). It would appear that most approved premises (abattoirs) have an AWO in place in some guise or another but that Standard Operating Procedures in some premises leave a lot to be desired.

The AWO training will be modular and staff can pick those modules that will be applicable to their area of work, although all aspects of welfare will need to be covered in each premise, from transport to

final sticking, bleed out and monitoring for signs of recovery. The selected modules will need to be completed within three months and staff can add further modules as and when necessary to cover other aspects and broaden their role. 'Grandfather' rights for operatives already in the roles will be available until the end of the year, though it is incumbent upon those operatives to make sure all the paperwork is completed in time enough to ensure that this happens.

Professional Recognition

At the beginning of the year, the Royal college of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) revised Charter received her Majesty's signature and the Charter came in to effect. The new Royal Charter allows for 'allied professionals' (note that the phrase 'paraprofessionals' is no longer in favour) to become associated with the RCVS, which the Association of Meat Inspectors had been hoping for in its ambition to achieve a formal professional recognition for meat inspectors.

On June 8th the AMI met with the RCVS in London to discuss the merits for both organisations of achieving this, and while acknowledging that it was now possible that this could happen, whether it was desirable that this should happen.

I am very happy to be able to report that these discussions proved to be very positive, with RCVS recognising the work that MHI's carry out during the course of their daily duties, not least in the realms of protecting animal welfare at the time of slaughter, and how an MHI's work fits neatly in to the criteria set out in the Royal Charter, and further acknowledging how MHI's and OV's work alongside each other. The Association were requested to

submit a formal proposal for consideration by the RCVS Council, and this will be done in due course.

Increased Opportunity

I have attended a couple of meetings with the FSA in the last few weeks, and one particular point has come to the fore several times which I think is worthy of mention on these pages.

It has been generally agreed by the MHI's attending that there is significantly more opportunity for career progression for MHI's now than there was, even as little as five years ago.

There have been some comments made by some that it might appear to be the same MHI's that are more likely to benefit from these opportunities, but, it should be borne in mind that although these opportunities are now there, the onus is upon the individual MHI to actively seek them out and make their applications. Nothing is being handed out on a silver platter and the individual is quite likely to have to be prepared to 'diversify' in some form or another to take advantage.

This could include operational diversification such as dairy inspection, wine inspection, unannounced audit inspection in the cutting plants (UAI's) etc.

I have been fortunate enough to catch up with a fair few MHI's doing this sort of work in recent weeks (as well as still carrying out meat inspection) and they have all stated just how much more fulfilling their role has become since they started performing in these other roles. In fact the renewed enthusiasm was almost palpable, especially with the UAI's where the inspectors concerned have achieved

some results that could be described as fairly remarkable, even spectacular in one or two instances. Well done ladies and gentlemen; I look forward to hearing much more about your successes (and challenges) in the future, hopefully at Seminar in September.

In recognition of this increasingly wider remit for MHI's, the Associations Trust has this year, for the first time, decided to include a non- meat inspection role on the agenda for this years Seminar. Ray Ede, lead dairy hygiene inspector (LDHI) has agreed to give a presentation outlining the work that DHI's do, why it is necessary, and I daresay that he will include some of the challenges that he has encountered in the three and a half years or so since the FSA first took the role on. I would imagine that this presentation will be very well received and if this proves to be the case, the Trust will endeavour to include other diverse roles in future seminars.

Campylobacter

The latest results of the FSA survey were somewhat disappointing in that it showed that, in spite of the efforts of industry, levels of contamination of fresh poultry at the point of sale had increased to 73%.

The FSA 'Campylobacter teams' in poultry plants are working together to share ideas, inform each other where good practices are working well and discussing challenges that they face. Industry are continuing to progress some innovations such as 'Sonosteam' and 'blast chilling' in their efforts to resolve the situation.

The Trustees have invited the British Poultry Council to present a paper at this years seminar on the steps that industry have taken, further innovations, and what more the industry can do.

North East and North West Divisions

It has been the case for some time now that the NE and NW divisions have not been functioning as is required. This situation has been discussed at Council and efforts to hold divisional meetings have failed. The national council took the decision that it would hold a special general meeting (SGM) in a location fairly central for both divisions to discuss the level of support within the two divisions and the possibility/necessity of consolidation.

Therefore, at the end of May, an SGM was held in Leeds. The support for the meeting was disappointingly low but the attendees were very forthright in their opinion, which was great to hear. They were firmly of the opinion that consolidation of the two divisions in to one 'North England' division was probably the sensible way to go. The council have instructed me to put together a questionnaire for the attention of the members of those two divisions to further ascertain their opinion, and that will be sent out with this edition. A final decision will then be taken at a future meeting of council, probably in September, as to the path to be taken.

I will of course keep you informed through a future report in Meat Hygienist.

Seminar 2015

This years Seminar is once again being held at Harper Adams University, over the weekend of 11th -13th September.

At this time, the AMI will also be hosting the board meeting of The European Working Community for Food Inspection and Consumer Protection (EWFC), many of whom we hope will stay on and join us for our Seminar. As the current President of the EWFC I would be more than happy to

introduce members attending to the members of the board so that you might gain an insight in to the work of our European colleagues. I'm sure that within a very short space of time you would come to appreciate that they face many of the same challenges, share the same sort of concerns as AMI members and also seek to maintain and raise standards of inspection in all aspects of food production.

Divisional sponsorship is available again this year for members, but it is imperative that you complete the application form and submit this to Stephen Holden. The application form is available in this edition and also on line via the website.

This year the Association is celebrating its fiftieth seminar and we hope to make this a celebratory event.

I know that inspectors always enjoy catching up and sharing their experiences and talking through the challenges that they face, and some good ideas have been exchanged at previous seminars.

It would be really good to see every member there (though I appreciate that this is simply not probable), but members efforts in getting there, and sacrifice in giving up a weekend is always recognised by the Trustees. It is the delegates that make the Seminar the success that it has been for the last half century. I sincerely hope to see you there and please, come and find me out and say hello.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson