

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all,

Dairy Hygiene Inspection

At last there has been some good news on the potential for some MHI's/PMI's to gain some diversification in their jobs.

This has come about by the FSA gaining the mandate to provide inspectors in dairy hygiene from the beginning of April.

Although only twenty places have initially been made available for the dairy hygiene training, there have been over two hundred applicants for those places.

I have for a long time stated that inspectors are versatile group of people who are hungry to learn/expand their roles and who are willing to go the extra mile to facilitate this happening. This has been amply demonstrated by your response to this invitation and I have to say that I am not in the least bit surprised and all credit to you. My understanding is that the training will be cascaded to additional inspectors when the scheme has been demonstrated to work and I have every confidence that MHI's/PMI's will again stand forward to be included.

Lactic Acid Washing of Beef Carcasses

The recommendation from the FSA board is that the option of lactic acid washing of beef carcasses is made available to those that would wish to use it. Some concessions have been made in that it will only be permitted on carcasses, not cuts or trimmings and that it will have to occur after PM inspection. The latest adjustment to the recommendation is; *that lactic acid can only be applied "after post mortem inspection is completed and the meat has been declared fit for human consumption". This replaces the previous wording that lactic acid can only be applied "after the health marking".*

We suggested that any meat subjected to LA washing was subsequently labelled as such but, as lactic acid is naturally occurring in normal carcase meat, any enforcement on this issue would prove difficult and so the suggestion was rejected. However, the latest amendment to the recommendation reads;

New text in Annex, Part III, outlining that food business operators must inform the Food Business Operator (FBOs) receiving the treated carcasses that they have been treated with lactic acid

This should put the onus on the receiving FBO to make a decision as to whether or not they wish to deal with meat treated in this manner. I would like to think that in due course, the consumer will also be able to make an informed choice as to whether or not they wish to purchase this meat and that market forces will then prevail.

Members Rant

An interesting letter this one, and expressing sentiments that I know many inspectors will relate to.

One comment that I would like to make here is this; OV presence during the slaughter process is required by EU directive, and this is not likely to change any time soon. This obviously includes ante-mortem inspection and I wish to go on the record here and now as saying that the OV's that I have the privilege to work with do a damn good job within the parameters that they have. It is still a rare event but I have seen more animals rejected at ante-mortem in this last year or so than at any other time that I have been doing the job.

As the author of this letter states, it is not the OV's responsibility to ensure that animals presented for slaughter are of an acceptable standard of cleanliness; it is the responsibility of the FBO and should be covered by the plants HACCP plan. I do however acknowledge that this does not appear to be happening!!!

The continual comments from members indicate this quite clearly and I believe that the cause lies in deficiencies of the legislation. I too, lament the passing of the clean livestock policy and I continually make the point when opportunity arises, to the point of ad nauseum in some quarters I'm sure. But this is the message that I keep getting from members and is the message I shall keep delivering.

What inspectors must continue to do is ensure accurate recording of carcass

contamination and to work with the OV's to flag up instances where a plants HACCP plan fails to adequately deal with the problem. Incidentally, I do not consider the placing of trimmers immediately prior to post mortem inspection to be dealing with the problem.

Ideally of course, industry would get a real grip on this situation and sort things out internally, but, after six years of missed opportunity, I have my doubts.

I do think that the author of this letter makes some extremely valid points though, not least about the move to risk based inspection/ visual only inspection (the modernisation of meat inspection) and the potential consequences of what will get missed. I have heard many times the argument that preventable cross contamination occurs due to needless incisions being made by the inspector, but personally remain unconvinced. In my view, if the inspector is given time to operate an effective two knife technique, the problem should not even arise.

We have made clear our reservations in many different forums and on many different occasions.

However, I am coming to believe that the political will on this issue means that risk based and VO inspection is likely to be introduced at some point in the future and I wonder where the buck will stop if it does prove to be ill advised.

The meat industry is reliant on consumer confidence and you might have thought that it would be extremely keen to do all that is possible to preserve it, but I fear

that in some quarters, cost cutting is indeed the primary consideration.

Professional Recognition/Code of Conduct

The code of conduct that is one of the cornerstones of moving towards achieving formal professional recognition for PMI's/MHI's is a topic that will be high on the agenda at national AGM. Obviously, this is an important document and it is imperative that we get this right from the outset. Not only does it have to be grammatically correct and the content appropriate, but inspectors should be happy to sign up to it and further happy to abide by its edicts. It is the belief of the National Executive that the document being proposed for adoption at AGM contains nothing that members would not be doing already and simply sets these standards down in a formalised manner. But this is your opportunity to let us know if we have not got it quite right. Your divisional secretaries will have a copy of the code and will make it available to you upon request. Many members have already seen this copy and some have made comments (mostly positive; one negative and one provocative) that have resulted in some minor amendments. I would like to thank these members for their input and taking the time to mail me. If any member has a problem in getting hold of a copy, or perhaps might like a draft copy in hard copy format, please drop a line at the e-mail address inside the cover or give me a call on 01453 756487.

AGM

AGM will be on Saturday 21st April at the Aztec West Hotel, Bristol, very near to the M4/M5 intersection and I hope that plenty of members will be able to attend. If you wish to book a place, please let me know by the last Friday in March.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson