

# General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all,

## **Seminar 2010**

The Association's 45<sup>th</sup> Seminar was held over the weekend of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September, at the University of Nottingham. I am pleased to report that once again, it was a great success with numbers up on the previous year and with EWFC in attendance having held their board meeting at the venue on the Friday. Delegates enjoyed papers on, among others, animal welfare training, Salmonellae in pigs, meat fraud, and, for interests sake, the humane slaughter of fish.

Directly after the President had formally opened the Seminar, we received an address from Linda McAvan MEP. One of the key messages that she put across was the importance of keeping meat inspection independent. She emphasised that the true battle here may well be the one to keep meat inspection in the public sector; a message that goes hand in hand with the line the association has taken for many years.

She also drew attention to the development of a product that I certainly had not heard about, but one which our European colleagues seemed to be well up to speed with, that of the use of Thrombin to make what was described as "a meat glue". The applications of such a product would, I imagine, be fairly evident to an informed readership.

I would suggest that you log on to youtube and search for "transglutaminase" to see for yourselves how this product works.

The first presentation on Saturday was a change to the programme, presented by Colin Houston, and was all about the E-coli 0157 outbreak in South Wales and how it came about.

The two points that came through loud and clear were that light touch enforcement did not work and that any operator that has scant regard for food safety and wishes to cut corners will persist if light touch enforcement is utilized.

Billy Steele then followed with a presentation on the work of the Meat Controls Scientific Steering Group (MCSSG). This group is looking at the "modernisation of meat inspection" and questions the effectiveness of "traditional" meat inspection. It also seeks to identify those areas where efforts might be better concentrated and those where traditional methods

may no longer have the importance that they might once have held. I rather suspect that we all have an opinion on this somewhat contentious subject and some trepidation as to where exactly this might lead.

We later received a presentation from Sue Davies of the Which? Organisation, which was very well received and which prompted many comments, both to me and other council members. Sue emphasised the point that meat inspection is not just about pathogens but also about preserving the wholesomeness of the meat that is offered for sale to the paying public. While she accepts that efforts could be concentrated more on reducing faecal contamination and the pathogens carried within, sight must not be lost of the parasites and other conditions which might simply render the meat unwholesome rather than unsafe. I believe that this is the position that we as inspectors have always taken and that we use the term "unfit". If any meat is deemed to be "unfit" for human consumption, then we reject it. No compromise!!!

I don't wish to go into details on any of these papers in this report as they will be carried in this and future editions of the Hygienist so that you can read them for yourselves.

On the subject of rejection conditions, it has been noted that some conditions are not being recorded in the numbers that might reasonably be expected, one of the examples being given as that of Caseous Lymphadenitis. It would appear that this condition tends to be recorded as a "pyaemia" or as "multiple abscesses". As one of the

cornerstone reasons for meat inspection is animal health, along with human health and animal welfare, I would consider the accurate recording of conditions to be a pre-requisite of the job. Consider it as an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge. It is appreciated that from time to time we all encounter conditions that are not clear cut, and in these circumstances I would suggest that the collective opinion of the team is utilized to achieve an accurate record.

### **Closed Circuit Television in Abattoirs**

I have been following the debate on this subject with a particular interest and I have read differing opinions on both sides. One point in particular which made me think a bit was the one asking whether or not someone was going to review the entire footage if CCTV were to be employed?

Quite obviously this would be an impractical scenario.

However, there is an argument that states that if an operator is doing everything that is required of them and that they have nothing to hide, then there should be no fear of CCTV.

Personally I feel that this is bordering on the line of assuming that the operator is guilty until proven innocent, an idea that I personally find distasteful and which is in my experience, very far from the truth. I am aware of the Animal Aid footage but I feel that this could well be down to the lapses of individuals rather than wholesale negligence. Therein lies the value of CCTV; in keeping individuals "honest".

If CCTV is in place then operatives would be far less tempted to cut corners or rush a job which calls for calm, unhurried and consistent efficiency.

Therefore, I have to conclude that the line taken by the Food Standards Agency in advocating and encouraging the use of CCTV, but in **NOT** making it a legal requirement to be an informed and correct decision and one that I personally would be happy to back fully.

If you have any opinion on this subject that you feel needs to be aired, please get in touch and let me know and your points can be made in future editions.

### **Robin Irish Award**

The Robin Irish Award is a trophy donated in memory of Robin, who was recognised as a stalwart of the Association, and is awarded in any given year to a person who has been recognised as giving outstanding service to the Association and furthering its cause. It is not necessarily awarded each year.

However, this year it has been awarded to Jan Van de Loo, of the Netherlands.

Jan is a food inspector who has been working within EWFC for many years. A former president of EWFC, Jan has this year decided to step back from active participation, although he will remain in the background to offer advice and support and offer the rest of us the benefit of his knowledge and experience.

The current president, Dr. Serge Losch attributed Jan`s success to his knowledge coupled with patience and a good sense of humour.

The giving of this award was planned but the standing ovation that ensued as Jan collected the award from our President Archie Anderson was both spontaneous and prolonged.



A worthy winner, I would like to say “well done Jan, richly deserved and enjoy your retirement”.

I feel that the coming months will bring about much talk about change and your Association will make sure that your collective views and opinions are aired and heard.

We will of course keep you informed.

Until then,

keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson