

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all,

At the Association's Annual General Meeting In April, the first members took the Declaration, signed the Professional Register and thus became the first Registered Meat Hygiene Inspectors (RMHI's) in the UK. This is the first step in formalising the working relationship between MHI's and the OV's that they work with.

This progress has been recognised by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the President, Ms. Jacqui Molyneux has taken the time to write a letter of commendation to the AMI to this effect, the text of which I am happy to be able to include for your information;

AMI Voluntary Professional Register

I am writing in my role as President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) to commend the work of the Association of Meat Inspectors (AMI) to develop and implement a voluntary professional register for Meat Inspectors.

As you are aware, the RCVS is the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons in the UK. The role of the RCVS is to safeguard the health and welfare of animals committed to veterinary care through the regulation of the educational, ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and nurses, thereby protecting the interests of those dependent on animals, and assuring public health. It also acts as an impartial source of informed opinion on relevant veterinary matters.

The RCVS welcomes the initiative of the AMI to develop this scheme for the voluntary regulation of the profession. The introduction of the voluntary register, the Code of Professional Conduct and the requirement to undertake continuing professional development serve to demonstrate the desire of the profession and individual Registered Meat Hygiene Inspectors to work to highest ethical and professional standards, so as to ensure the protection of public health and animal welfare. Voluntary initiatives such, as that implemented by the AMI, are also the first step towards the formalisation of any profession in statute.

The RCVS is also supportive of the Declaration that Registered Meat Hygiene Inspectors will make when joining the Register:

I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY declare that my constant endeavour as a Registered Meat Hygiene Inspector, will be to ensure consumer safety and the welfare of animals and that I will pursue the work of my profession with impartiality, integrity and accept my responsibilities to the consumer, the public, the profession and Members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

By accepting responsibilities to Members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Registered Meat Hygiene Inspectors are

formalising a working relationship that has always existed with Veterinary Surgeons. This close relationship of trust between Meat Inspectors and Veterinary Surgeons is fundamental to the important work they undertake on a daily basis, to protect public health and ensure confidence in meat products.

Whilst Meat Inspectors fall outwith the jurisdiction of RCVS, we would be delighted to offer any advice that we can so as to assist you with the development of your Register. If you have any questions, then please do not hesitate to contact my colleague Anthony Roberts at the details on the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqui Molyneux

President

The Veterinary Public Health Association was also quick to acknowledge the progress of the AMI and to welcome the RCVS recognition of that progress.

The members of the AMI Executive have now been mandated to take the declarations from other MHI's wishing to subscribe at events such as divisional meetings and we anticipate that there will also be opportunity at future Seminars and Annual General Meetings.

With this edition of the Meat Hygienist we have included a personal details update form. This will enable the Association to hold accurate records of each member for the Voluntary Professional Register. As an alternative to mailing the form to the registrar, members can print, complete and send a scanned copy to the following email address;
webmaster@meatinspectors.co.uk

Visual Only (VO) Inspection of Pigs

As you will probably know already, on May 22nd European Member States voted for new legislation to modernise the inspection system in pig slaughterhouses that *“aims to improve food safety by increasing the focus on microbiological hazards, which are the main foodborne risk of today”*.

The new legislation will now be subject to scrutiny by the European Parliament and Council, and is expected to be adopted by the European Commission and then come into force in June 2014. Further information on the proposals and key changes is available at: <http://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/news/2013/may/piginspections>

I would like to inform the membership, through these pages exactly where the AMI stands on this matter.

It is the opinion of the AMI Council that this decision is diametrically opposed to the Association's stated aim of *“Promoting and encouraging meat inspection and hygiene and improving the standards thereof”*.

We are not aware of any evidence that demonstrates that the MHI, utilising the prescribed two/three knife technique of inspection and afforded reasonable time do so, will contribute to cross contamination to any greater extent than the operatives eviscerating the carcass, most notably the operative at the point of pluck removal. The extent of the contamination caused by the dressing and evisceration process was noted by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) when they first published their analysis of the pig slaughter process. We fail to see how, in light of all this contamination, that

a diligent MHI incising two lymph nodes is going to make any discernible difference to the bacterial load.

For this reason we cannot concede the point that hygiene will be improved but we do feel that the standards of inspection will be compromised due to pathologies that are routinely detected, remaining undetected under a visual only system of inspection.

We would of course be happy to consider any such evidence that might support the view to the contrary and then to re-consider our position on this matter. Isn't that the way educated professionals are supposed to work? But we fail to see how this clear cut evidence could be obtained in the first instance.

We also believe that this proposed system is not in the best interests of the Consumer and will lead to pathologies, most notably abscesses and tuberculous lesions entering the human food chain. We feel sure that the public, if asked, would most certainly not be very accepting of this situation, as is the case with all MHI's that I have spoken to.

This situation is likely to be compounded by the fact that the meat where these lesions are likely to remain undiscovered will be meat routinely used for manufacturing, and the additional issues that might arise from this should not be ignored.

Therefore, the Association of Meat Inspectors cannot support this decision.

If any member should have further comment that they might like to see made available to the wider audience, please

drop me a line and let me know. The thinking of the Council is that this could just be the thin edge of the wedge, and it is not such a huge leap, if this should get passed, that it is then extended to the other red meat species.

Personally, it makes me wonder exactly where the meat industry is going. This proposed system of Visual Only inspection has received broad support from the Pig slaughtering sector, probably of the notion that they can save the costs of an inspection position or maybe further increase line speeds. But I would urge caution; we know that the British consumer can be fickle, as demonstrated by various perceived food "scares" over the years, such as Avian Flu, Swine Flu etc. If this system of VO inspection should happen to cause a loss of confidence in the product, then we all stand to lose out. And confidence, once lost is hard won back.

I can almost envisage a dual system of inspection i.e. Traditional, where the FBO has requested that the MHI carries out routine incisions as currently, versus "Modern", utilising VO inspection.

I can actually see astute FBO's advertising this as a selling point.

Seminar 2013

I am happy to be able to inform you that Seminar this year is moving back to what some might call the Spiritual home of Seminar, in that we are going back to the Harper Adams University in Shropshire.

We have arranged a deal that should see us there for the next three years, which will also take in the landmark 50th Seminar

in 2015. If all goes to plan, 2015 should be a truly European event, with the EWFC Board, Vice-Presidents and Member State Representatives all in attendance.

Some of you will remember the last time we hosted EWFC and what a fantastic Seminar that proved to be.

An application form is available in this copy of Meat Hygienist, or, should you not wish to be removing pages from your copy, it is also available on the website at www.meatinspectors.co.uk

It seems to be the only time that many MHI's have chance to meet these days, share their experiences of the last twelve months and exchange views and ideas, and, in some instances, to air their grievances.

I sincerely hope to see many of you there.

I know I always end with the same line (probably down to a lack of imagination) but, in light of recent events in the meat industry, I feel that this is now merited more than ever.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson