

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all.

I hope you all had a very merry Christmas and I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and prosperous New Year.

This is an opportune moment to inform you that the timing of your Meat Hygienist has changed a little, with the first issue of the year now coming to you in January rather than December.

The national press have once again sought out the stories about meat industry over the Christmas period; one in particular caught my eye and this was to do with a couple of instances of consumers discovering their Christmas turkeys being affected with green muscle disease (Oregon disease) when time came to carve. I read the story on line and I always take time to read the comments section to try and understand the public perception of any such situation. The big question in this instance seemed to stem from just who was liable for the 'ruination' of Christmas for the families concerned; the retailer, the producer or the system of production itself? I am continually surprised at the level of misunderstanding and 'emotional' responses posted by people that clearly have no understanding of the situation but

who feel compelled to make comment. One poster, who I rather suspect was either from the meat inspection or veterinary professions, did take the time to state the facts of the matter in a direct, uncomplicated way and simply got vilified for their trouble.

Personally, I feel that the fact that these sort of stories are so uncommon in light of the numbers of birds sold is testament to the quality of the inspection in preventing this condition reaching the consumer in greater quantities. Great job done by the PMIs and the PIAs.

Spotters in plant

The suggestion that plant employed 'spotters' could be utilised as an 'aid' to meat inspectors has once again been mooted.

The response below is one that the council has submitted to the FSA, although, as yet, it has not been carried in any of their internal publications. I felt it was important the membership had sight of this response to assure them that the Association is aware, is making its opinion known and will continue to speak up where we feel standards are, or could be at risk of compromise.

Dear Editor,

We read with great interest the article headed 'Spotters may bring benefits' carried on the back page of the last edition of Between the Lines.

This isn't the first time this issue has been raised, and the Association of Meat Inspectors (AMI) has voiced its concerns to the FSA before.

We received then assurances that 'spotters' would be just that and would not be removing pathologies prior to PM inspection. If that is truly the case, then we potentially would not have too many issues with it.

However, we all know that it is sometimes difficult to prevent slaughtermen removing pathologies as it is. How many times have we had to ask for livers to be retrieved from the gut room because they have been thrown out with the guts? Grown in plucks / races from pigs / sheep going in the bin because the operative on evisceration has deemed them to be 'no good' or 'contaminated'?

In our view, the spotter system does not take in to account the potential for things to go amiss due to the 'human' element; that burning desire by slaughtermen to get the job done and let little or nothing stand in their way to achieve the required workload in the shortest time possible. On the face of it, an admirable sentiment. But in reality, it is easy to see how this is likely to transpose into an altered work ethic whereby lesions are being removed during the course of production whether or not the MHI is aware of them. Are operatives qualified to differentiate whether the abscess in a beef liver is Tuberculous or not? Whether the contaminated pig pluck or lamb race also harbours lesions in the lungs, liver or heart that might indicate a systemic condition?

For this reason alone, we are sceptical of the whole concept. We can envisage the situation occurring regularly whereby MHIs are being expected to health mark a carcass without having sight of all the necessary evidence. We will stand up to this potential compromise of the MHI most vociferously.

On a more 'practical' note; we are all aware of the criticism that has been levelled against MHIs and the FSA in the

past for inaccurate recording of PM conditions, and we fail to see how, if the spotter system is utilised and by natural progression 'extended' in the manner we describe above, that accuracy will be improved in any way. There will be an extra link in the communication chain and thus, in our view, an extra potential for communication to break down.

We would welcome an honest and open debate on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Robinson

General Secretary, Association of Meat Inspectors

Traceability

The new systems of recording Food Chain Information and the Collection and Communication of Inspection Results (FCI/CCIR) is all but in place and up running, with the final rollout for pigs taking place by the time you get to read this report. The whole system will be periodically reviewed and 'tweaked' to achieve the best results possible and adapt to emerging / declining conditions and the needs of those who utilise the information collected.

The next stage in the project is to turn the attention to achieving enhanced traceability. In an ideal world, there would be a traceability for each individual animal and in the red meat sector, with the advent of electronic identification in sheep, it should, theoretically at least, be possible to achieve this. It is acknowledged that FBO 'buy-in' is going to be fundamental if this goal is to be attained.

If any of the membership has knowledge or ideas that could be shared, why not take

the time to drop them in to an e-mail and forward them on to me? I will make sure that they get put forward to the right people and get discussed and I will make sure that the accolades go to the person who has taken the trouble to get in touch in the first place. It is all for the common good, and should all go to enhance the role of the MHI as well.

Brexit

As we are all aware, in June 2016 the great British public voted by a margin of 52% to 48% for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Clearly this will have ramifications for the meat industry and the inspection protocols at some point in the future. The Association was invited to attend a meeting at the RCVS to discuss the issue(s) and the veterinary advisor to the association attended and voiced our concerns in a clear, un-ambiguous manner.

- The opposition to deregulation and a 2 tier system
- The risk for the loss of expertise
- The need for the educational qualifications for the different roles to be established in the new situation and
- The support of MHIs by the RCVS

Brexit could also potentially have consequences for the AMI's role within the European Working Community for Food Inspection and Consumer Protection (EWFC). At the last meeting of the EWFC board in October it was agreed that the UK have played a major role over the last 25 years and the input from the UK representatives is hugely respected. Therefore, the board agreed that there will continue to be a place at the table for the UK in the future.

AGM

A note for your diaries; AGM 2017 will be in Scotland at the Kings Manor Hotel, Edinburgh on Saturday 8th April.

If you would like to attend, please drop me a line so that I can ensure that everybody is fed and watered.

Details will of course be available on the website.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson