

General Secretary's Report



A warm welcome to you all.

Following on from an exceptionally busy few months throughout the summer, we held our Annual Seminar over the weekend of September 14th to 16th, at Harper Adams University. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Trustees and staff at Harper Adams for working extremely hard throughout the weekend to make it such a success, and in particular thanks to Stephen Holden as our seminar organiser. A very varied selection of speakers made for lots of debate, and the questions from the floor were excellent.

Friday evening was a departure from our normal format, as it included a debate on what direction Meat Inspection might take in the future. The evening started with a presentation from Dr. Colin Sullivan and Martin Evans, followed by questions from the floor.

With the announcement a few days before that the Food Standards Agency are going to recruit thirty-six Official Auxiliaries, a move that we as an Association have been promoting with them for a very long time, there was a lot of interest in what form the training will take. The FSA intends to train their new recruits to carry out additional tasks such as Unannounced Audit Inspections, as well as our core role of Meat Inspection. The training will be more diverse, in order to meet future business needs. Questions were inevitably asked about what additional training will be made available to existing employed MHI's, and I look forward to seeing how this will be addressed.

The AMI Trust were involved in recognising the effort put into the training carried out a few years ago, with an award to the best student, and I hope we can similarly recognise their achievements this time as well.

The debate was structured under a number of sub sections to focus the responses from delegates. These were;

Fundamentals
In Plant
Technical

Fundamentals included recruitment and training, as many MHI's believe that the right candidates to become Inspectors are put off by the Civil Service recruitment process. It was good to here that this is one area that will be addressed. Other comments included a desire to see better knife skills training and also a desire to ensure that as the job evolves, experienced staff won't be lost if they only wish to do meat inspection.

In Plant comments included a popular view to have 'Seniors' reintroduced. This was driven by a desire to have consistency and a point of contact between the FBO and FSA teams. There was also concerns expressed about the high turnover of Contractor staff, with the constant need to train new recruits. With the push to develop a very welcome 'One Team' approach, it was felt this was difficult to achieve with the difference in terms and conditions.

Technology inevitably touched on the use of touchscreens and their accuracy, as well as the information from the use of HACCP and microbiology. One big concern was the routine use of trimmers. In order to comply with regulations, it has become the norm in many establishments to trim every carcass, and this raises the question of how effective is HACCP based principles in solving the problem of contamination through addressing the root cause? There is also the issue of cost to the farmer, if routine trimming is reducing carcass weight instead of taking measures to prevent contamination occurring in the first place.

Details of the papers presented on the Saturday can be found in this edition of The Meat Hygienist, as well as subsequent ones, and I would like to thank all our speakers for giving their time to deliver such interesting and informative presentations.

I would also like to thank WR Wrights, The Humane Slaughter Association, the Civil Service Academy and Unison for exhibiting this year. Special thanks also to Michelle Barrett and Sandy Cavers for the fascinating display of Pathology conditions and items found at Post Mortem inspection, and Andy Grist for bringing along part of his collection of historical Humane stunning equipment.

Proposed Changes to Ante and Post Mortem Inspection within the EU

Shortly before the summer recess in the European Parliament, the Commission put forward a proposal to introduce an Implementing Act under Regulation 625/2017 EC to permit the inspection of a representative sample per batch of poultry, instead of the current system of inspecting every bird. Our colleagues within the EWFC ensured that this was brought to the attention of MEP's, who raised an objection. Upon enquiry, we were all delighted to hear from the Food Standards Agency during seminar that the proposal had been withdrawn. However, unfortunately the Commission has resurrected the proposal, and issued a draft act to include batch inspection of poultry within the new regulations.

The changes as proposed, I believe could have the potential to cause an unacceptable risk to Public Health, especially as there seems to be conflicting evidence for and against. Implementation of the proposal will be decided by each member state, so let's hope that this change doesn't make it onto our Statute once we leave the EU. You might have seen this reported in the UK press, and further details can be found on the EWFC website at <https://ewfc.org/post/ewfc-rejects-the-commission-draft-proposal-to-stop-the-inspection-of-every-poultry-carcass/>

Further information can also be found on our website.

At the time of writing this report, we are only a few weeks away from CCTV becoming compulsory in Slaughterhouses. However, it is of great concern to see that there has been yet another video released where animal welfare standards appear to have been ignored by certain individuals working in an abattoir in Devon. Commendably, swift action has been taken, but it acts as a reminder to to be vigilant at all times and to work to support the 'One team' approach when it comes to enforcing the high standards demanded by legislation. MHI's are often best placed to act as the 'eyes and ears' for the Official Veterinarian, and any concerns should be raised with them. I would like to also applaud the work of the Welfare Assurance Team, who have undertaken unannounced visits to every establishment in England and Wales, to assess what work was necessary by Business Operators to comply with the new rules. This small dedicated team, has advised industry and ensured that they are able to understand the changes to achieve compliance. Well done to them all.

Regards,

Jeremy Thomas