

RIs 6/11/1

6 March 2018

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Defra
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JP



Dear Secretary of State

Small Slaughterhouses

I am writing on behalf of independent craft butchers and slaughterers in England and Wales to request government action to find a long-term future for the rapidly diminishing network of small local slaughterhouses.

I note that the bill announcing compulsory CCTV in English abattoirs has now come forward. As a butcher and small slaughterhouse operator myself, I understand that public confidence in high animal welfare standards is of vital importance. Poor animal welfare is abhorrent to everyone and undermines customer confidence in industry and regulators alike.

You will note that the small abattoir sector is in great difficulty and sadly numbers continue to reduce. The causes for this decline are three-fold; over regulation, poor by-product prices and increased waste removal costs. Ironically these small establishments are seen by most as being best for animal welfare reducing stress due to the short distances that animals travel and low throughput.

I am writing to ask the government to consider making veterinary ante-mortem inspection in low throughput plants the responsibility of the FBO which supported with CCTV will reduce the regulatory burden and make a cost saving for the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The removal of veterinary ante-mortem inspection in small abattoirs, supported by FSA 2014 statistics and identified in the latest report from the Sustainable Food Trust, will not diminish food safety or animal welfare. The practice in France where the flexibilities made available in EU Regulation 854/2004 are made use of, whereby initial ante-mortem inspection is carried out by Official Auxiliaries (OA's) and verified only where necessary by official veterinary inspection is worth considering. Particularly, as leaving the EU provides opportunity for the UK government to benefit those operators only supplying the domestic market.

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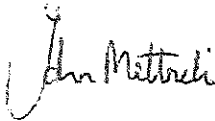
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The installation of a CCTV system costing around £10K could lead to low throughput plants closing which will mean poorer animal welfare in the long run. We need a meat inspection system that is proportional to the risk and not rule based and I hope that the government can deliver this and keep these valuable small plants alive.

Long supply chains despite being supported with reams of paperwork as various incidents demonstrate are more susceptible to error. Surely the short supply chain of Farmer to butcher to customer is worth preserving.

My Federation will be happy to work with government to find ways to support small abattoirs and reduce regulatory burdens. I am writing to encourage you to consider such an initiative beginning with my suggestion for ante-mortem inspections.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Mettrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

John Mettrick BSc MB.FinstM

President