

P-05-889 Labelling of Religiously Slaughtered Meat, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 01.07.19

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to legislate that all meat and meat based products that come from religiously slaughtered animals is clearly labelled.

It is not the intention of this petition to cause any difficulty to any group in not being able to exercise their beliefs.

It is however intended to highlight the issue of meat products from religiously slaughtered animals are entering the general market place and as such should be clearly labelled to enable all consumers to make an informed choice based on welfare, ethics or personal belief when purchasing such products.

The UK has been at the forefront of animal welfare legislation for more than 100 years.

The first Protection of Animals Act was passed in 1911 and covered domestic or captive animals, including farm animals, since then there have been many iterations of the Act in British Law.

However, one of the clauses in the Act which has always been retained is the one which makes it an offence to cause any unnecessary suffering to an animal that is being destroyed to provide food for mankind.

Our laws require that all these animals must be reared, transported and slaughtered humanely, with strict legal methods mandated for the slaughter of animals for food, devised to ensure a swift and painless death and requiring the animal to be stunned and unconscious before being despatched.

The only method of slaughter that achieves this is captive bolt slaughter, which renders the animal "brain" dead and unable to feel pain.

Religiously slaughtered meat is carried out by two methods. One, the animal, unstunned, has its throat cut and bled out, until death occurs. The second is a half-way house method, recoverable stun, whereby the animal is stunned, whilst the heart still beats it is bled out, then the throat is cut.

The problem is that the stun is recoverable and whilst sheep can take up to 70 seconds and cattle 2 minutes to bleed out, recovery from the stun can start at 30-60 seconds and 45-90 seconds respectfully.

If at any time the slaughter does not comply with the religious practices of the group and becomes rejected as "unfit for religious consumption" then that meat cannot be used by that group, however it is still suitable to be sold on to enter the market for the consumption by the general public without their knowledge of its final demise and production.

It is the reason why the petition calls for labelling.

Labels drive demand, and add value. They're the only real tools that consumers have to communicate our preference for higher-welfare products to producers.

Labels empower citizens to drive standards more effectively and to reward farmers who invest in better farm animal welfare. Definitive labelling is required in order to exercise our right of choice.

When buying meat, everyone should look in their supermarket for labels showing welfare certifications.

In the UK the welfare certifications are:

Red Tractor, RSPCA Freedom Food, RSPCA Assured Logo, Soil Association Scheme, Humane Slaughter Association not to mention other labels such as organic, free range, barn reared, vegetarian, vegan and allergy warnings, as well as health and dietary labelling. We also have 'Method of production' labelling.

In the UK, mandatory 'method of production' labelling has been in place for shell eggs since 2004, and the UK pig industry adopted voluntary 'method of production' labels in 2010. So, there is no problem in labelling pork products to show the welfare standards followed in their production and slaughter.

Therefore there is surely no reason why all meat sold in this country should not be clearly labelled to show if it is religiously slaughtered.

As a side to this, DEFRA's official guidelines (www.gov.uk/guidance/halal-and-kosher-slaughter) published in October 2015 state categorically the legal requirement that all meat ritually slaughtered MUST be sold only to Muslim or Jewish buyers. This is also clearly shown on all Licences of Exemption from Regulations of Normal Livestock Slaughter (which must be obtained for all meat that is ritually slaughtered) which state 'it is an offence to Slaughter livestock under this exemption from stunning if the meat is not intended for the food of Jews and Muslims'.

Virtually all UK supermarkets (including Waitrose, M&S, Tesco, Morrison's, Sainsbury's and Asda) sell religiously slaughtered meat without labelling because it is easier and less costly for them to do this than to differentiate it and ask customers to prove they are Muslims or Jews – but it is nevertheless unlawful.

It is also being sold into hospitals and schools that maybe cohabited by many groups with many beliefs for whom the consumption of religiously slaughtered meat is unacceptable.

For example, Defra report: Results of a survey carried out at all slaughterhouses operating in England and Wales for a single week period 29 January 2018 to 4 February 2018.

Sheep slaughtered - 244,355 by method :

Standard stun 28.7%, Halal Stun 46.2%, Halal NonStun 24.9%, Shechita 0.1% :

Total Religious slaughter 71.3%.

Of which 54% of sheep slaughtered went to wholesalers, markets, and supermarkets, of which contained 68% of the Halal NonStun meat and 27 % of Shechita meat was rejected as kosher but fit for consumption. (The Hindquarters of animals are not regarded as kosher so also end up sold on to markets etc)

The Muslim and Jewish community, the main identifiers of religious slaughter represent roughly 6.8% of the population in the UK, which the above shows over production of religiously slaughtered meat compared to its market size.

It is the reason why the petition calls for labelling.