

20 June 2003

## **REPORT ADVISES RELIGIOUS SLAUGHTER WITHOUT STUNNING SHOULD BE ENDED**

The animal welfare organisations that prepared this report (2003) hope that MPs and Peers will support the Farm Animal Welfare Council's (FAWC) recommendation that the law should be changed to require **all** animals to be stunned before slaughter.

The FAWC is an independent body that advises Government. FAWC members include veterinarians, animal scientists, academics and animal welfare specialists.

At present, the law requires animals to be pre-stunned, but provides an exemption for animals slaughtered for the food of Muslims and Jews. Such animals can be slaughtered while they are fully conscious. The FAWC has recommended that the Government should repeal this exemption, which would mean that religious slaughter without pre-stunning would have to come to an end.

The animal welfare organisations recognise that the Jewish and Muslim faiths both stress the importance of treating animals kindly. We value religious freedom highly, but believe that this freedom cannot extend to the use of slaughter methods that lead to great animal suffering.

The FAWC report concludes that when a very large incision is made across the neck, a number of vital tissues are transected including: skin, muscle, trachea, oesophagus, carotid arteries, jugular veins, major nerve trunks plus numerous minor nerves. The FAWC points out that such a drastic cut will inevitably trigger a barrage of sensory information to the brain of a conscious animal.

Crucially, the FAWC concludes that *'such a massive injury would result in very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes'*. The time-lapse between throat-cutting and insensibility can be relatively lengthy, during which the animals may experience severe pain and distress. The FAWC concludes that adult cattle may take 22–40 seconds to become insensible. This period can be extended when the flow of blood from the severed carotid arteries becomes blocked. Such obstruction takes place in some adult cattle and particularly in calves. Research on calves has found that they can take as long as two minutes to lose sensibility after throat-cutting.

The FAWC states that sheep become insensible within 5-7 seconds of the cut. Other authoritative research reports longer delays, finding that sheep take on average 14 seconds to lose insensibility if both carotid arteries are cut, but that this extends to 70 seconds if only one carotid is severed, and to 5 minutes if neither is severed.

Some members of the religious communities point out that ordinary slaughter (eg: stunning) can go wrong and animals can suffer. This is indeed the case. However, slaughter with stunning has the potential – if performed correctly – to lead to a relatively humane death, whereas slaughter without stunning has no potential for acceptable welfare: each animal inevitably suffers greatly.

We are pleased that over the last few years there has been a significant change, with most animals slaughtered for Halal in the UK now being pre-stunned. Stunning is acceptable for some within the Muslim community, provided that it does not kill the

animal, but only renders it insensible, with death being caused by loss of blood following the throat-cut.

The time has now come for further progress and for the law to require all animals – including those slaughtered for the food of Muslims and Jews – to be stunned.

The UK would not be alone in taking such an approach. The Saudi Arabian authorities accept electrical stunning as being consistent with Halal. New Zealand, a major exporter of Halal meat, adheres to the practice of stunning, and this is known by its customers in the Middle East. In the Netherlands, some calves slaughtered for Halal are now pre-stunned. Moreover, Swiss and Swedish laws require all animals to be stunned.

We recognise that change will be difficult for the religious communities, but we cannot accept that the slaughter methods that cause severe pain and distress to hundreds of thousands of animals a year should be allowed to continue into the indefinite future.