



Improving the welfare of farm
animals at the time of their death:
The campaign to end non-stun slaughter





The RSPCA and the British Veterinary Association (BVA) oppose the practice of non-stun slaughter for farm animals.

Farm animals are sentient beings, meaning they experience feelings and emotions and have the capacity to suffer and feel pain. This must be taken into account throughout their life, including at the time of killing.

Stunning an animal before they are killed is carried out to ensure the animal is unconscious and will therefore not feel pain or suffer at the time of killing.

The slaughter of animals without stunning is happening today in the UK and we would like to:

- present the facts about non-stun slaughter
- explore current laws affecting slaughter
- dispel some of the myths surrounding non-stun slaughter
- share how you can help farm animals.

The science

Scientific evidence clearly indicates that non-stun slaughter can cause unnecessary suffering.

A Farm Animal Welfare Council report on the welfare of farmed animals at slaughter or killing concluded that animals that are not stunned suffer¹: *...very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes*.

When an animal is not stunned before slaughter, the neck cut triggers a barrage of sensory information to the brain in the conscious animal.

Only after prolonged blood loss will the animal become unconscious and insensitive to pain. According to EFSA guidelines², the time taken for animal brains to lose responsiveness is:

- sheep – up to 20 seconds
- cattle – up to 2 minutes
- poultry – up to 2.5 minutes.

A 2010 EU report on slaughter practices states³: 'There is a critical period after the incision, during which an unstunned animal may temporarily perceive pain and distress before it becomes irreversibly unconscious due to severe blood loss'.



Electro-immobilising in poultry

With regards to poultry, some halal slaughterhouses use a water bath method to stun poultry in accordance with religious rites involving electrical currents, which would not fall within the legal parameters required for conventional slaughter. In these cases, some birds may be electro-immobilised, resulting in them still being conscious when they are killed. This type of stun, which can be ineffective, is recorded within the 2018 Food Standards Agency report as a 'non-stun'. For other species such as cattle and sheep, there are clear legal parameters to apply a pre-stun for religious rites.

The law and exemptions



The EU Regulation on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Killing came into force in the UK in 2015. This law states that animals must be stunned (rendered insensible to pain) before they are slaughtered. However, an exemption allows sheep, goats, cattle and poultry to be slaughtered without pre-stunning for religious purposes.

By law, stunning must render an animal immediately unconscious. Methods of stunning include:

- **mechanical stun** – e.g. using a captive bolt
- **electrical stun** – e.g. electrical stun tongs and electric water bath
- **gas stun** – e.g. use of carbon dioxide.

The Regulation also sets the parameters for the application of a stun e.g. the electrical current and voltage, to ensure the stun is sufficient and that the animal is insensible (unconscious) until death supervenes.

Slaughter legislation in the UK is devolved to the governments of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each country implements its own 'Welfare at the Time of Killing' (WATOK) regulations and provides exemptions permitting the non-stun slaughter of animals for Jewish and Muslim communities.

EU law does not prohibit a member state from banning slaughter without pre-stunning or making improvements to slaughter regulations. Indeed many countries and regions have prohibited non-stun slaughter, including Wallonia, Slovenia, Denmark, Latvia and Flanders. At present, there is no commitment from the UK governments to end non-stun slaughter after Brexit.

Furthermore, Regulation 1099/2009 which builds on previous Regulation 93/119 states that "provisions applicable to religious slaughter have been transposed differently depending on national contexts..." Based on this, our interpretation is that national context should mean the domestic market and not include the import requirements of another member state or a third country market.

¹ Farm Animal Welfare Council. (2003). Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part 1: Red Meat Animals.

² European Food Safety Authority. (2014). Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from the Commission related to welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing the main commercial species of animals.

³ DIAREL Project, K.vol Holleben et al. (2010). Report on good and adverse practices – Animal welfare concerns in relation to slaughter practices from the viewpoint of veterinary sciences.

All figures referenced in this report relate to the 2018 Food Standards Agency Survey into Slaughter Methods in England and Wales.

Published February 2019⁴

Over a billion farm animals (excluding fish and crustaceans) are killed each year in the UK. Over 94 million of these animals are killed without being pre-stunned, due to the legal exemption for religious purposes.

Farm animals killed in the UK:

936.6 million broiler (meat) chickens	41.7 million egg laying hens	12.7 million sheep	9.1 million pigs
7.6 million turkeys	1.9 million cattle and calves	20 thousand goats	

Number of farm animals in England subjected to non-stun:

Over 94 million farm animals were slaughtered without pre-stunning in 2018:

91.8 million for halal certified meat

2.9 million for kosher certified meat

Breakdown by species: number of animals killed without stunning and percentage of total number killed:

90.8 million broiler chickens (9.7%)	3.1 million sheep (25%)	584 thousand egg laying hens (1.4%)
38 thousand turkeys (0.5%)	30 thousand other poultry (0.2%)	22 thousand cattle and calves (1.1%)
1.5 thousand goats (7.5%)		

None of the governments within the UK have a legal requirement that ensures all animals are stunned before slaughter. However, all animals currently slaughtered in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are being stunned before slaughter.

Non-stun slaughter and trade

Sheep meat is the only non-stunned meat being exported outside of the UK.

24% of the meat from the 3.1 million sheep not stunned is being exported.

762,231 UK sheep killed by non-stun slaughter were destined for meat export.

Non-stun slaughter for religious purposes

In the UK, Jewish and Muslim communities are exempt from legal requirements to stun animals before slaughter. Shechita (Jewish) and Halal (Muslim) slaughter methods can involve cutting the animal's throat with a very sharp knife, often without pre-stunning.

Halal labelled meat

Traditional halal meat is killed by hand and must be blessed by the slaughterman. It is permissible under some readings of Islamic law for animals to be pre-stunned. However, some sections of the Muslim community do not accept an animal as 'Halal' if it has been stunned. A traditional method of halal slaughter doesn't involve a stun, and requires a deep incision with a sharp knife on the neck that cuts the jugular vein. According to the 2018 FSA Animal Welfare Survey, a larger proportion of halal certified meat comes from animals that have been pre-stunned.

218 million animals killed by halal slaughter

58% were pre-stunned in line with EU parameters (126 million animals)

42% were not pre-stunned or were poultry that were ineffectively stunned (91.8 million animals)

All animals slaughtered for halal were accepted and the meat was certified for religious consumption.

Kosher labelled meat

Jewish slaughter, known as shechita, involves a 'Shochet' who performs the slaughter and is trained in Jewish law. A special knife called a chalaf is used which has to be extremely sharp to achieve the desired cut. No animals killed for kosher receive a stun.

2.9 million animals killed by kosher slaughter

None of these animals were pre-stunned.

90,500 animals mostly broiler chickens, were rejected as being unfit for religious consumption and may have entered the food supply unlabelled.

The FSA report states that: "It is unclear whether or not hind quarters [from animals killed for kosher certified meat] are generally sent on for wider consumption." Therefore, meat from tens of thousands of rejected animals and the unused hind quarters of accepted animals being killed using non-stun methods could be packaged and unlabelled and sold to unsuspecting consumers as conventional meat.

Religious slaughter and animal welfare can work together. For example, some Muslim communities both in the UK and abroad accept the stunning of animals before slaughter as Halal.

Sufficient supply for the demand

We believe that the spirit of the law is to limit the number of animals subjected to religious slaughter to be sufficient only to meet the demand of the local (national) religious communities. The UK governments at present do not share this view and meat from non-stunned animals is currently being exported to other countries.

Furthermore, some councils, such as Kirklees in West Yorkshire, have a blanket policy to serve non-stunned halal meat in its schools, therefore failing to ensure that non-stunned meat is served only to the communities the exemption is in place for. Other councils such as Lancashire, have a policy to not provide non-stunned meat in their schools.



⁴ 2018 Food Standards Agency Survey into Slaughter Methods in England and Wales. February 2019. Available from: www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-animals-survey-of-slaughter-methods-2018

Farm assurance labels

These are some of the UK's largest farm assurance schemes that require animals to be stunned before slaughter.



Method of slaughter labelling

72%
of UK
consumers
want to know the method
of slaughter for the meat
products they eat.
(YouGov 2017)

Some animals that are slaughtered without stunning do not meet the required standards demanded by the intended religious community. For example, the knife used may have been damaged during the process, or the meat from the hindquarters may not be considered kosher. This results in the meat being rejected on religious grounds, which we believe can then enter the conventional market and be unknowingly purchased by those that do not have such requirements.

Such meat must therefore be clearly labelled to enable consumers to make an informed choice and align their purchasing habits with their own personal preferences and beliefs.

'Pre-stunned', 'Post-stunned' and 'Non-stunned' meat labels could provide sufficient information for the consumer to make an informed choice.

Myths and FAQs

Myth: Only religious slaughter involves cutting an animal's throat.

Killing an animal by throat cutting (also known as 'sticking') is not exclusive to slaughter for religious purposes, it is a practice used to bleed out and kill the vast majority of cattle and sheep in the UK. However, pre-stunning ensures the animal is unconscious when the neck is cut so the animal does not suffer.

Myth: The neck cut is just like a stun

A stun is a process that results in the immediate loss of sensibility (consciousness) in the animal. Religious groups claim that the neck cut serves as a stun. However, after neck cutting there is a period of time before the animal loses consciousness. Therefore the scientific evidence shows that a neck cut is not consistent with an animal immediately losing consciousness and, as such, cannot be considered a form of stunning⁵.

Myth: Religious meat is cruel and needs to be banned

There doesn't necessarily need to be a ban on meat that is important to religious communities to ensure farm animals receive a more humane death. A proportion of halal meat comes from animals that have been pre-stunned and certified as halal, which highlights that more humane slaughter practices and religious requirements can work together. However, all kosher certified meat for the Jewish community comes from animals that have not been pre-stunned.

FAQ: But aren't all the animals stunned for religious meat just paralysed – it's not an effective stun?

The legislation concerning the killing of farm animals does not make reference to any stunning parameters that must be used for poultry killed in accordance with religious rites. Such an omission leaves this important area – which has a significant impact on poultry welfare at a critical time – unregulated. It is possible that those parameters being used could result in the animals being electrically immobilised and conscious rather than effectively stunned. For those slaughterhouses using stunning parameters that don't meet the EU regulations, the Food Standards Agency is now recording this as a 'non-stun'. For other species such as cattle and sheep, there are clear parameters to apply a pre-stun.

Worldwide progress

Non-stun slaughter is illegal in Denmark, Malta, Slovenia, Sweden, Cyprus, Finland, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Wallonia and Flanders in Belgium. We strongly urge the governments in the UK to follow these examples.

New Zealand has never permitted the slaughter of animals without stunning. Despite this, they have a successful meat export trade to Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Australia does allow a small number of poultry and sheep to be slaughtered without pre-stunning for local Jewish consumption only, but these animals receive a post-cut stun, which reduces the period of consciousness. Meat from these animals can be exported to New Zealand if required.

In Germany abattoirs must apply for a licence if they wish to perform non-stun slaughter for religious exemptions. The licence will determine the number of animals which are permitted to be slaughtered using this method. This aids traceability should the actual number involved exceed the amount stated on the licence.

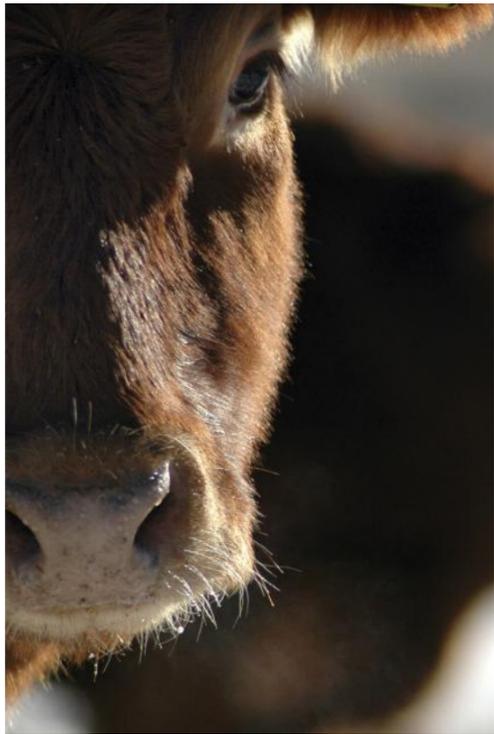
⁵ Mellor, DJ., et al. 2009 A re-evaluation of the need to stun calves prior to slaughter by ventral neck incision: An introductory review. New Zealand Veterinary Journal 57, 74-79



All animals should be stunned before slaughter.

Whilst this practice continues and until there is a change in the law to end non-stun slaughter, we call on the governments in the UK to urgently implement the following measures:

1. Ensure supply goes to the intended communities
Stricter measures are needed to ensure that the supply of meat from non-stunned animals matches the demand from the local communities that the derogation is intended to serve only.
2. End the export of meat from non-stun slaughter
The export of meat from non-stunned animals must be prohibited as a practice that is not in the spirit of the current legislation. The export of non-stun meat must be prohibited as a practice that is not in the spirit of the current derogation to provide food for the consumption of the UK's religious communities. Germany has banned the export of non-stunned meat.
3. Ensure greater transparency
There must be a system in place which records and regularly reports on the number of animals which have not received an effective stun, those who have not received any stun and the amount of non-stun meat that is exported.
4. Introduce method of slaughter labelling
All meat from animals that have not been stunned must be clearly labelled. This will enable consumers to fully understand the choice they are making when purchasing such products.
5. Move to post-cut stunning
We recognise that while pre-stunning is superior from a welfare point of view, should non-stun slaughter continue to be permitted, post-cut stunning should be required to reduce the period of suffering.



Support the campaign

Get involved in the campaign by visiting www.rspca.org.uk/endnonstun and join the online debate using [#EndNonStun](https://twitter.com/EndNonStun)





Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Telephone: 0300 1234 999 www.rspca.org.uk

The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered charity no. 219099.

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