

Competent Authority comments on draft report of an audit carried out in The United Kingdom from 25 February to 1 March 2013 in order to evaluate the implementation of Council of Europe requirements for animal welfare in major farmed species and official controls on chickens kept for meat production

Action plan : received on 7 June 2013

N°.	Recommendation	Action Proposed by the Competent Authority
1	<p>The CA should continue with measures to achieve full implementation of the Recommendations concerning farming of additional relevant species as laid down in the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes, including the provision of suitable checklists and official procedures to fully cover the Council of Europe Recommendations.</p>	<p>The CA will continue to take measures to implement Council of Europe recommendations adopted under the European Convention for the Protection of Animal Kept for Farming Purposes through legislation and administrative arrangements. The majority of the species specific Council of Europe recommendations have been implemented in full through national welfare legislation (which also implements EU legislation) and species specific on-farm welfare codes, such as the cattle and sheep recommendations. A small number, like the turkey recommendations, have largely been implemented through a combination of national welfare legislation and welfare codes, but have also been implemented through incorporation into accredited farm assurance schemes in the UK.</p> <p>Whilst farm assurance schemes are not audited by the CA, they do undergo a thorough verification process. Taking turkeys as an example, it is estimated that 95% of UK turkey poults (100% of all year round turkey production) are farm assured either by Freedom Foods or Quality British Turkeys (QBT). QBT is the only EN 45001 approved turkey growing and processing scheme in the world. From 2007, QBT became part of the Red Tractor Farm Assurance Scheme. Specialist certification bodies independently verify that producers are adhering to the published standards. Participating producers are subject to routine surveillance assessments and random audits by these bodies. Any non-conformances must be put right. For the more minor ones, non-conformances have to</p>

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		<p>be corrected within an agreed timescale, normally 28 days. A major non-conformance against any 'key standard' will result in suspension of the producer's certification until it is put right. If a producer is suspended and does not take the necessary action to rectify the non-conformances within 3 months certification will normally be withdrawn. As part of the accreditation process, Red Tractor assurance regularly reviews the performance of all certification bodies to ensure they are operating in accordance with the scheme procedures correctly and consistently. These certification bodies are accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) which provides confidence in independence and competence. The Government Department for Business, Innovation and Skills works with UKAS to ensure that it operates in the public interest and meets the obligations required by EU Regulation 765/2008.</p> <p>Accredited farm assurance schemes play a significant contribution to driving up animal welfare standards in the UK. It is Government policy to take a more deregulatory approach to policy-making and implementation, to work more in partnership with the farming industry and for producers to take more responsibility. This responsibility can be demonstrated through the principle of earned recognition, to inform and target inspections, so that the inspection burden is reduced for those who have a strong track record of reliability and adherence to standards, thus acting as an incentive for good practice. Provided the scheme is UKAS</p>

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		<p>accredited - so as to ensure an appropriate level of auditing - membership of a Food Assurance Scheme is part of the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency's risk inspection model.</p> <p>Turning again to the specific example of turkeys, the CA will explore ways in which seasonal turkey producers, through farm or small producer organisations, are aware and implement those individual Council of Europe turkey recommendations that have not been implemented through legislation or the turkey welfare code. Council of Europe recommendations will be incorporated into a series of turkey workshops, run by ADAS and funded by the Rural Development Plan for England, aimed at seasonal producers which will be held around the country during 2013/14.</p> <p>AHVLA and Local Authorities regulate and enforce the legal requirements through giving verbal advice, written advice, serving notices, initiating prosecutions and where necessary seizing and or disposing of animals. In serious situations prosecutions will be initiated after an initial inspection particularly where unnecessary suffering has occurred. In serious cases a fine and or a ban from keeping animals and or a custodial sentence may also be imposed. In addition to formal enforcement action claimants can lose significant sums if a payment reduction is imposed through cross compliance. All AHVLA inspections of farmed animals include assessment both of compliance with legal</p>

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		<p>requirements and those contained in the codes. This is intended to ensure that all non compliances are accurately identified and that corrective action is taken. AHVLA revisit until they are satisfied that the animals are being adequately cared for. The courts take into account whether codes are being observed in addition to the legal requirements.</p>
2	<p>The CA should take measures to ensure that: the environmental parameters specified in Annex 1 point 7 of the Directive in relation to minimum lighting periods for birds, gas parameters laid down in Annex II point 3 of Council Directive 2007/43/EC, and the requirements for records of daily mortality rates to accompany consignments of birds to slaughterhouses as required in point 1(1) of Annex III to the Directive, are effectively monitored and enforced in the application of national measures to ensure the welfare of chickens reared for meat in the UK.</p>	<p>The CA will update the inspection checklist (WF82) and guidance to include legislative requirements of environmental parameters in these documents. VOs will be instructed that they must check records of environmental parameters including light intensity experienced by a flock and where necessary check such parameters if they are thought to be in breach of Council Directive 2007/43/EC or if there are no records of such measurements or if records need validation. The Operations Manual and associated VO guidance document on environmental parameters will be updated accordingly by September 2013. Where environmental parameters are likely to be a causal factor in observed poor welfare, inclusion of actions to resolve problems thought to be caused by environmental parameters will be requested as part of an Action Plan. The CA will update the Action Plan template and guidance to ensure that, where relevant, improvements in monitoring and control of environmental parameters are included by September 2013.</p> <p>The CA will explore with the meat chicken industry (by September 2013), via the Broiler Core Stakeholder Group, the extent to which the</p>

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		<p>industry sustain reduced light levels after thinning and work towards ensuring full compliance. The CA will remind the industry of the environmental parameter requirements. The CA will ensure that it is clear in the revised guidance being consulted on by the meat chicken industry during 2013 what the light intensity requirements are after thinning.</p> <p>Although daily mortality rates are not provided on the Food Chain Information report accompanying each batch of birds to the slaughterhouse, the sum of these rates, the Cumulative Daily Mortality Rate (CDMR), is routinely provided. CDMR data are used to inform the OV and the trigger system on the welfare provenance of the birds, and OVs have the ability to request the full record of daily mortality rates from keepers where they think that this would be beneficial (as described in the FSA's Manual for Official Controls).</p> <p>Daily mortality rates are requested and reviewed by AHVLA VOs during inspections of meat chicken holdings, and additionally when investigating trigger reports in which the Process 1 trigger level for CDMR has been exceeded (as described in AHVLA's Operations Manual).</p> <p>Discussions with delivery body representatives and other stakeholders have demonstrated that in most cases having access to daily mortality</p>

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		<p>rate data for all flocks is of no benefit in determining the welfare status of birds. It is for this reason that we have chosen to establish a risk based approach for reporting and monitoring these data by establishing processes for requesting and reviewing these data when it is considered beneficial to do so. Routine provision of daily mortality rate records accompanying each flock to the slaughterhouse would prove unduly burdensome both to industry and to the CA with no significant benefit to animal welfare.</p>
3	<p>The CA should take measures to ensure that, as required in Article 8(3) of Council Regulation (EC) No 882/2004, sufficient procedures and processes are put in place to guarantee the effectiveness and appropriateness of official controls on all areas of the production of chickens reared for meat.</p>	<p>Defra will work with AHVLA to reassess whether the current number of inspections of establishments with meat chickens is sufficient. In line with the CA's risk-based approach to official controls, we anticipate that any change in the inspection regime will focus on inspecting premises that are at greatest risk of non-compliance. In addition, meat chicken inspections cannot be regarded in isolation from other enterprises and the CA will keep the FVO informed of appropriate developments. The Post Implementation Review project, which will be informed by an independent research team, will be used to inform a review of the trigger system, official controls and other aspects of 2007/43 for meat chickens in England and Wales by 2015 (5 years after implementation).</p> <p>Information was provided to DG (SANCO) on proposed action to improve current arrangements for AHVLA and introduce further comprehensive quality assurance and audit arrangements as part of the</p>

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		CA response to DG(SANCO)/2012/6424 - FVO General Follow up Audit to the United Kingdom for the purpose of updating the Country Profile.
4	The CA should take measures to ensure that, as required in Article 4(3) of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004, there is effective communication between OV's and AHVLA VO's in the transmission and feedback of information relating to exception reporting of indications of severe welfare conditions found in birds at slaughterhouses.	<p>Following the audit, the CA has already put in place a plan to improve the communication between FSA OV's and AHVLA VO's relating to exception reporting. Updated instructions will be provided to OV's in the FSA's Manual for Official Controls (MOC) at its next update (September 2013). It will be made clear that exception reports will be communicated to the Duty VO at the AHVLA office closest to the abattoir both by phone and by email. An article has been written for all FSA staff to inform them of this change in process and this will be published alongside the MOC update. The AHVLA Operations Manual will be updated in September 2013 to communicate this amended process to VO's.</p> <p>Improvements will be made in feeding back the action taken on exception reports to FSA following AHVLA assessment. The most appropriate form of feedback will be identified through discussions between FSA, AHVLA and Defra, and it is anticipated that such a feedback mechanism will be in place by the end of 2013.</p>