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FINAL REPORT OF AN AUDIT
CARRIED OUT IN
IRELAND
FROM 09 MARCH 2015 TO 13 MARCH 2015
IN ORDER TO
DETERMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ANIMAL WELFARE TRAINING
PROGRAMMES

In response to information provided by the Competent Authority, any factual error noted in the draft report has been corrected; any clarification appears in the form of a footnote.

Executive Summary

This audit took place in Ireland from 9 to 13 March 2015 to determine the effectiveness and suitability of the activities to ensure staff looking after or handling farm animals possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence. The audit focussed on the pig and slaughterhouse sectors.

The report concludes that training provided by a professional semi-state body which liaises closely with stakeholders and the competent authority provides a strong contribution to improving awareness and compliance with legislative requirements.

Training programmes are well developed and implemented in both the pig and slaughter sectors, comply with legislative requirements and are valued by farmers and operators.

The Competent Authority has utilized training, either formal or informal, along with financial incentives to enable it to secure compliance in certain areas and raise animal welfare standards in a number of sectors.

The report makes no recommendations to the Irish authorities. It highlights what was regarded as a good practice by the Competent Authority in using a practical veterinary assessment of training outcomes for operatives in the slaughter industry.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

Abbreviation	Explanation
AWO	Animal Welfare Officer
BO	Business Operator(s)
CA	Competent Authority
CCA	Central Competent Authority
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
FAWAC	Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council of Ireland
FVO	Food and Veterinary Office
OV	Official veterinarian
Teagasc	Agriculture and Food Development Authority

1 INTRODUCTION

This audit took place in Ireland from 9 to 13 March 2015 as part of the planned audit programme of the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO).

An opening meeting was held with the Central Competent Authority (CCA) on 9 March. At this meeting, the objectives of, and itinerary for, the audit were confirmed by the mission team. The audit team comprised two auditors from the Food and Veterinary Office and one national expert and was accompanied throughout the audit by a representative from the CCA – the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

2 OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The objective of the audit was to determine the effectiveness and suitability of the activities to ensure staff looking after or handling farm animals possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence.

The FVO had selected the pig sector for review and the CCA had been asked to select one sector from the three remaining sectors (broilers, transport and slaughter) for which there are also specific EU requirements regarding operator competence. The CCA selected the slaughterhouse sector and therefore the scope of the audit was on the relevant activities in those sectors. In pursuit of the objectives, the following meetings were held:

Meetings		Comments
Competent Authorities	5	As well as an opening and final meeting, three meetings took place with CA staff responsible for carrying out official controls in slaughterhouses (2) and on pig farms (1).
Pig Sector	1	One meeting with trained pig stockpersons (4) all of whom had received training in their sectors.
Slaughterhouse Sector	3	Two meeting with two groups of slaughterhouse operatives (7 in total) including 2 animal welfare officers, all of whom had received training in their sector. One meeting with 4 Official Veterinarians.
Trainers	4	Meetings with training bodies and trainers providing training and setting examinations in pig (2) and slaughterhouse sectors (2).
Industry, non-state veterinary sector	5	The audit team met representatives from the Irish Farmers Association, Bord Bia, Meat Industry Ireland, Teagasc and Veterinary Ireland.

3 LEGAL BASIS

The audit was carried out under the general provisions of EU legislation and, in particular Article 45 of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules.

EU legal acts quoted in this report are provided in Annex 1 and refer, where applicable, to the last amended version.

4 BACKGROUND

The EU strategy for the protection and welfare of animals 2012-2015 (COM(2012) 6 final/2) that was adopted in January 2012 indicated that one of the key issues which needed to be addressed was that many stakeholders lack sufficient knowledge about animal welfare. Subsequently a study on animal welfare education was launched to identify the animal welfare topics which should be included in the professional curricula of those involved with animals and which actions would be needed to improve awareness among those professions. This study should be finalised in 2015.

This series of FVO audits aims to identify activities that are suitable and effective in delivering high levels of knowledge and competence to the professional sectors on animal welfare, and therefore achieve a high level of compliance with animal welfare requirements.

5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN THE PIG SECTOR

Legal requirements

Article 4 of Directive 98/58/EC requires Member States to ensure that the conditions under which animals are bred or kept comply with the provisions set out in the Annex of this Directive. These include, amongst other issues that animals are cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence. In addition Article 6 (b) of Directive 2008/120/EC, hereafter the pig directive, requires Member States to ensure that appropriate training courses are available, and such courses must focus on aspects of pig welfare.

Findings

1. The EU requirements for the provision of suitable training courses in the pig sector in Ireland are met through a combination of regular workshops and vocational training provided by the Agriculture and Food Development Authority (hereafter Teagasc).

Further information to support conclusions

2. The CA places a high degree of emphasis on the provision of training (either formal or

informal) and it features prominently in its annual Business Plan. The possibility for the CA to legislate on the provision or requirement for training has also been included within the scope of its powers in the recently introduced Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

3. Additional information and training for the pig sector is provided by Teagasc researchers and farm advisors, via Competent Authority (CA) advisory and enforcement campaigns, such as the recent changeover to loose housing, and through quality assurance programmes.

Details of, and feedback on, pig workshops, vocational training and other activities are set out below.

Teagasc Pig Workshops

4. Teagasc was established under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act 1988 and has a statutory responsibility for the provision of education, training and advisory services in agriculture. Its training and advisory and research functions are developed in conjunction with clients and partners and are overseen by the Teagasc Authority, which includes representatives from the farming and research sectors and the CA.
5. Teagasc one day modular workshops on the pig directive were drafted in cooperation with the CCA and have been held regularly since these provisions entered into effect in 2003, originally on a monthly basis, and now twice yearly or depending upon demand. The course provides behavioural and physiological information which gives the rationale for the legislative provisions. All commercial pig farms have sent operatives for this training.
6. The workshops have been revised a number of times to incorporate guides to good practice such as the Irish Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council's (FAWAC) Code of Practice on Pig Welfare, UK Pig Veterinary Society's Guidance on the Casualty Pig, feedback from the CA and participants and various administrative developments.
7. Feedback from participants indicated that the interactive workshops, where Teagasc deliver information in a format that allows for attendees to question & discuss the information and the written material (course presentations and guidance described in point 5 above) were the most appreciated elements of the training.

Vocational Training

8. Teagasc has reviewed training needs in the pig sector in close cooperation with the IFA (Irish Farmers Association), members of which sit on the Teagasc Authority and on the Teagasc Advisory/Education Committee and the IFA/Teagasc Pig Joint Programme (see below under point 13).

9. It has offered vocational training in the pig sector through the Pig Production FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council of Ireland) Level 6 courses. This had two year duration and was run twice at two of their agricultural and research centres in Ireland between 2009 to 2011 and 2011 to 2013.
10. The FETAC Level 6 course consisted of 20 workshops (students had to attend 16/20), 24 months' work experience on their own farm completing designated competencies supervised by a Teagasc approved skills trainer, a further 13 compulsory modules including one on animal health, welfare and veterinary medicines and a farm project.
11. Pig farmers who had participants in the course found it to have been a very well-targeted and implemented course for them and their staff, but had reservations about the duration and intensity of certain workshops. Their reservations and other administrative requirements have resulted in this course being superseded by a new FETAC Level 5 course which is being run from 2013 to 2015 and provides a more flexible modular approach whereby a certificate can be obtained for a basic qualification in a much shorter time.
12. The Level 5 course is presently undergoing accreditation by QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) a government agency responsible for maintaining and developing the national framework of qualifications. QQI requires Teagasc internal audits of examiners' performance and may carry out audits on the implementation of the course. The course has been successfully peer reviewed by external experts outside Ireland and adjusted as required.

Other Activities

13. The pig industry through their Development strategy for 2008 to 2015 is part funding Teagasc in their research, advisory and training programmes through a slaughter levy of ten cents per pig to run for five years, subject to review. This Pig Joint Programme, agreed between Teagasc and the IFA National Pigs and Pig meat Committee, has funded Teagasc posts for two advisors, two researchers and one technician for the pig sector.
14. The Teagasc pig research team are actively involved in the development of vocational training and provide workshops for pig farmers on different subjects including animal welfare; publish monthly information newsletters and present their research findings on a regular basis through conferences and seminars.
15. Feedback from pig farmers indicated that the research findings previously published did not always permit comparison with commercial farm situations. Teagasc researchers indicated that the additional budget and scope of newer research (detailed below) should go some way to addressing these concerns but that there are always limitations with incurred economic losses and the use of expensive equipment on commercial farms.
16. Current or recently finalised research on pigs includes amongst others:

- Pigwelfind: Developing *ante* and *post-mortem* inspections of pigs as a welfare diagnostic tool;
 - Welpig: Exploring the link between poor welfare, production diseases, antimicrobial usage and resistance on Irish pig farms;
 - Preventing lameness in Irish pigs;
 - Optipig: Optimising output per sow;
 - Investigations on suitable materials for environmental enrichment.
17. The pig advisors provide regular on-farm advice to the pig farming sector and have been actively involved in finding solutions, along with the local CA veterinary services, to the challenges imposed by the changeover to the provision of group housing for sows and gilts.
18. The CA has used training along with financial incentives to enable it to secure compliance and raise animal welfare standards in a number of sectors such as:
- The beef industry where the Suckler Welfare Scheme required compulsory training for more than 40, 000 participants, including animal welfare aspects, before premiums were awarded;
 - The meat chicken industry where the CA chose to fund a Welfare Training Course for all keepers rather than utilise the possibility of granting “grandfather rights” under the provisions of the directive
 - The pig sector, the CA provided funding to modernise and install group housing of sows and gilts amounting to 40% grants through the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) financed from EU rural development schemes. Applicants had to attend a Teagasc Pig Welfare Workshop to avail of the grant.
19. DAFM carried out an intensive information campaign with farmers and stakeholders and veterinary inspectors made more than 450 advisory, inspection and enforcement visits. Teagasc advisors assisted with the provision of technical advice including an 80 page booklet “Towards January 2013” which gave updates, and explained options for implementing the required changes. From a reported low compliance rate in 2009, the combination of funding, advice and training, and consistent enforcement ensured that full compliance was achieved in 2014.
20. The CA has also utilized the results of official controls on pig farms to target subsequent campaigns. The latest campaign planned is how to deal effectively with sick and injured pigs on farm. Training has already been given to veterinary inspectors prior to the start of the campaign and a FAWAC guidance booklet on the care of sick and injured animals on farms will be distributed to stakeholders when it has been finalised.
21. Almost all Irish commercial pig farms are members of a quality assurance scheme. Training on these standards is provided when they are introduced or revised. The training on the standard includes elements of animal welfare and the farm audits themselves

function as an annual refresher course. Whilst feedback from the major Irish scheme indicated that the results from farm audits showed a noticeable improvement over time, other representatives from Teagasc and private veterinary practitioners indicated that animal health and welfare plans required under the standard were not optimally utilized in many cases and were not always revised to reflect changing conditions on farm.

22. FAWAC is an advisory body to the Minister of Agriculture and includes representatives from industry, the CA, farming bodies and Teagasc, Northern Ireland, and local authorities in its membership. It publishes guidance to stakeholders (see points 6 and 20) and the public on farm animal welfare issues.

Conclusions on training activities in the pig farming sector

23. There is a continuous level of training available through both vocational qualifications and regular Teagasc pig workshops which address the requirements for the provision of suitable training on EU animal welfare legislation.
24. There are also many additional activities and sources of information which allow stockpersons to update their knowledge and competence on animal welfare in the pig farming sector. Training programmes are well developed and implemented and the feedback from business operators was very positive.
25. Industry and other stakeholders have been involved at a high level in the development of training strategies. The CA has utilized training (either formal or informal) effectively along with financial incentives to enable it to secure compliance in specific areas and raise standards.

5.2 TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE SECTOR

Legal requirements

Article 21 (a) and (c) of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009, hereafter the regulation, requires Member States to designate a CA to ensure that training courses are available for personnel involved in killing and related operations and to approve these training programmes and the content and modalities of the examination.

Findings

26. The EU requirements for training courses in the slaughterhouse sector in Ireland are met through CA approved training with applicants subject to standardised examinations and practical assessments of competence.

Further information to support conclusions

27. DAFM Veterinary Public Health Inspection Service (VPHIS) started activities to implement the training requirements of the regulation early in 2010 and continued throughout 2012 with introductory seminars for DAFM staff and industry.
28. VPHIS consulted at an early stage with Meat Industry Ireland and Teagasc as to how the provision of training and awarding of certificates of competence could be organised and participated with industry in the first Teagasc Animal Welfare Officer (AWO) training courses to provide suitable feedback on course design and content. This led to the development of two separate courses: one for AWOs and one for other plant operatives.
29. VPHIS is involved in the approval of training courses leading to the issue of certificates of competence. It has provided guidelines on suitable methodology and the content of training courses to those bodies (Teagasc, business operators in-house trainers and other third parties) wishing to run courses and has approved 13 after requiring and approving amendments for 10.
30. The association of local authority veterinarians have adopted and are adapting VPHIS procedures for the approval and operation of courses suitable for operatives working in low-capacity slaughterhouses.
31. Approved training courses comprised a mixture of lectures, discussion groups, workshops and video presentations and must cover the seven slaughter operations from Article 7(2) listed in Annex IV to the regulation. All workers receive the same course content regardless of which operation(s) they perform. The first part of the course covers general animal welfare, e.g.:
 - The meaning of stress and suffering in animals – the causes and how to reduce or eliminate them;
 - The “five freedoms” described in FAWAC and others’ literature;
 - General animal behaviour.The seven operations are then dealt with separately with emphasis on carrying these out without causing the animal unnecessary pain or suffering. There is no practical “hands-on” element in the training courses and most training courses last one day.
32. Business operators make arrangements for the training of their staff using an approved course. In general this is done at each slaughterhouse, but occasionally at a hotel. Immediately following the completion of each training course Teagasc staff are present to issue and invigilate the examination. Pass rates have been reasonably consistent across all the different types of training courses offered.
33. There has generally been few changes reported in the operation of training courses but business operators have been advised to give staff, such as security operatives, experience of the various areas upon which they will be examined.

34. Participants trained and BOs indicated that the training was well received, provided the rationale behind welfare requirements, and gave many operatives a sense of achievement as they would not previously have undergone any formal animal welfare training, sat an examination on animal welfare, nor received any official certificate of competence.
35. It was also noted that the provision of training in certain poultry plants required up to 60 staff (mostly those hanging birds on the slaughter line but also security staff who would be the first assessment point for consignments arriving) to be trained and that this was a very large logistical and financial commitment from business operators.
36. The system for the issue of certificates of competence for plant operatives is as follows:
- Plant operatives must attend a VPHIS approved course;
 - They must sit and pass the official animal welfare examination;
 - They must undergo a visual assessment by the slaughterhouse OV;
 - OV collates results of visual assessments and official examinations;
 - OV forwards a summary report on each applicant to DAFM Meat Hygiene Division;
 - DAFM Meat Hygiene Division then issues an appropriate certificate of competence to each applicant.
37. The system of visual assessments and reporting prior to the issue of certificates of competence by MHD has contributed to administrative delays in the granting of certificates of competence: about one third have been awarded. However, this was viewed by both the CCA, business operators and the audit team as a very worthwhile initiative that gives good assurance regarding the actual competence of staff. The original assessment of operatives by OVs was based upon interviews with operatives, but later changed to a more visual assessment to take into account different literacy and educational levels.
38. The system for assessing the competence of AWOs is as follows:
- They must sit and pass the official animal welfare examination;
 - AWOs are also expected to have passed the Teagasc AWO examination;
 - Their ongoing effectiveness is determined by slaughterhouse OVs through regular bi-annual audits of animal welfare where a section of the report (AWA1) relates specifically to the performance of AWOs.
39. AWOs met were experienced and had received much training prior to the introduction of the regulation. The introduction of the animal welfare training requirements for other operatives was viewed as an opportunity for AWOs to further raise standards as the rationale for their actions and the general responsibilities for animal welfare were now very clear to all operatives.

40. VPHIS chose to delegate the organisation of the animal welfare examination to assess theoretical competence to Teagasc as it had the necessary expertise, staff and equipment necessary to do this. The Teagasc examination system is as follows:

- An hour long open book written examination;
- 23 questions of which 40 to 50 per cent are multiple choice;
- Individuals with literacy or language issues are accommodated through notation of verbal responses;
- Those marking examinations are different Teagasc staff to the trainers who give Teagasc animal welfare courses;
- Exam markers take the best 20 answers and are provided with standardised answer keys to mark papers;
- The pass mark is set at 80 per cent;
- All examination papers are returned to Teagasc;
- Marked papers are cross checked.

All slaughter operations required under the training requirements of Annex IV to the regulation are effectively covered in the examination papers reviewed by the audit team.

41. OVs indicated that the training exercise and subsequent requirement for operator assessment had been useful in a number of ways:

- It improved communication between them and operatives with whom they would previously have had little contact;
- In contrast to the differing requirements required by various retailers, this single standard has imposed consistent training across all the slaughterhouses in company groups;
- The examination process and the awarding of the certificate of competence gives validity to the time spent by the operator and the expenses incurred by the business operator.

Conclusions on training activities in the slaughter sector

42. The EU requirements for training courses in the slaughterhouse sector are effectively met through CA approved training with applicants subject to standardised examinations and practical assessments of competence.

43. The CA has opted for a practical assessment of all trained operatives which gives a good assurance regarding the actual competence of staff.

6 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Training provided by a professional semi-state body which liaises closely with stakeholders and the competent authority provides a strong contribution to improving awareness and compliance with legislative requirements.

Training programmes are well developed and implemented in both the pig and slaughter sectors, comply with legislative requirements, and are valued by farmers and operators.

The Competent Authority has utilized training, either formal or informal, along with financial incentives to enable it to secure compliance in certain areas and raise animal welfare standards in a number of sectors.

The use of a practical veterinary assessment of training outcomes for operatives in the slaughter industry was judged to be a good development and as such this information will be disseminated to other Member States.

7 CLOSING MEETING

A closing meeting was held on 13 March with representatives of the CCA, at which the main findings and preliminary conclusions of the audit were presented by the audit team.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no recommendations from this audit.

ANNEX 1 – LEGAL REFERENCES

Legal Reference	Official Journal	Title
Reg. 882/2004	OJ L 165, 30.4.2004, p. 1, Corrected and re-published in OJ L 191, 28.5.2004, p. 1	Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules