Time to ban non-stun slaughter

Every year in the UK approximately 3 million cattle, 13 million pigs, 19 million sheep and lambs, 70 million fish and 800 million birds are slaughtered for human consumption.

At present, European law prohibits non-stun slaughter but allows member states to provide exemptions for the Jewish (Shechita) and Muslim (Halal) methods of slaughter. The UK therefore allows slaughter "by a religious method", while making it clear that this relates only to slaughter by members of the Muslim and Jewish faiths, and to provide meat for consumption only by people of those faiths. Nonetheless the hindquarters of animals killed by (non-stun) Shechita can enter the market unlabelled, as there are no specific EU or national legal requirements governing the sale and labelling of halal or kosher meat.

Proponents of non-stun slaughter believe that the operation can be humane, providing it is properly carried out. But according to the independent UK Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), the drastic incision across the animal's neck inevitably results in very significant pain and distress while the animal remains conscious. Without stunning, the time between cutting through the major blood vessels and loss of consciousness can be up to 20 seconds in sheep, up to 25 seconds in pigs, up to 2 minutes in cattle, up to 2½ or more minutes in poultry, and sometimes 15 minutes or more in fish.

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) has organised an e-petition to the UK government based on the scientific evidence of suffering in non-stunned animals, and calling for an end to slaughter without pre-stunning for all animals. Currently over 80% of UK Halal slaughter is pre-stunned (so-called "recoverable" stunning). The petition is open until March 2015 and will be considered for a debate in the UK House of Commons if it reaches the 100,000 signature threshold.

Progressive examples from overseas strengthen the call for reform in the UK: slaughter without prior stunning has been successfully banned in Poland, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Sweden, while Finland, Denmark and Austria require stunning immediately after the incision if the animal has not been stunned before.

OneKind believes that the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning should be banned outright.

What can you do?

- Make a regular donation to support OneKind campaigns
- Sign and share the BVA petition here http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/64331
- Write to your MP, MSP, AM or MLA asking for clearer labelling as a matter of urgency, with a ban on non-stun slaughter as soon as possible

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