



Keep it clean – the importance of presenting clean animals for slaughter

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It's that time of year again when the cleanliness of stock being presented for slaughter becomes an increasing issue for processors.

The Food Standards Agency, who are present in all abattoirs to enforce hygiene controls, have clear guidelines for livestock producers detailing the cleanliness requirements of both cattle and sheep at slaughter. Dirty animals increase the risk of carcass contamination by food poisoning organisms, such as e coli and clostridium, during the dressing process. This presents real risks for public health and consumer perception of meat and meat products.

The Clean Livestock Policy has five levels of cleanliness for cattle and sheep, with '1' being clean and dry, and '5' being filthy and wet. Only animals in categories '1' and '2' can be slaughtered without restrictions. Any animal falling into the higher categories will need some additional controls, for example clipping the animal pre-slaughter or operating on a reduced kill line speed. These additional restrictions increase costs for the processor which in turn may be passed back to the producer, resulting in reduced returns.



Beef animal categorised as dirty which will need special attention at the abattoir

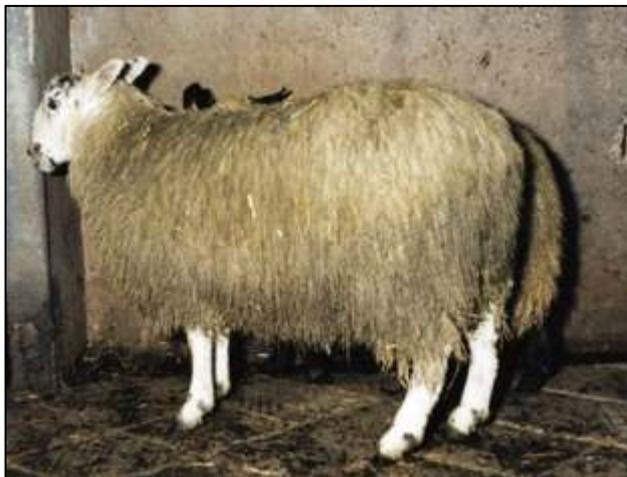
Try to present only clean, dry stock for slaughter. Preventing animals becoming dirty in the first place is the ideal, but clearly this cannot always be achieved.

Prior to forwarding cattle for slaughter consider:

- Ration – look at changing animals on a silage or brewers grain based ration to a drier ration. Alternatively, provide cattle with free access to straw fed from a ring feeder, or include long chopped straw in mixer wagon rations
- Bedding – providing adequate straw and bed-up frequently to improve cattle cleanliness
- Clipping – to remove visible signs of dirt. This should only be done as a last consideration as it can be stressful for the animal, damage and devalue the hide, and be dangerous for the producer.
- Reduction of dung contamination during transit - research has shown that contamination is reduced on cattle fed on straw and water only for up to 36 hours prior to slaughter

Prior to forwarding sheep to slaughter consider:

- Ration – for sheep approaching finishing and being fed on silage, roots and brewers grains look at changing to a drier ration (e.g. a higher cereal ration)
- Housing – bed-up sheep regularly with adequate clean, dry straw. For animals being finished off grass, house overnight prior to sale if possible, to reduce gut fill and minimise the risk of the carcass becoming contaminated during slaughter.
- Dry fleeces – try to ensure sheep are dry prior to slaughter as wet fleeces increase the spread of bacteria.
- Daggging – always dagg sheep before introducing them to finishing crops / diets.
- Belly clipping – particularly relevant if sheep are coming off roots or dirty/wet ground. However, over zealous clipping can damage and devalue the skin. Leave belly clipping as close to sale as possible and keep on clean, dry bedding.



Sheep classified as dirty under the Clean Livestock Policy

For more detailed guidance on the cleanliness requirements for livestock, visit: www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/farmingfood/cleancattleandmeatsafety/

The message is clear - ensure your stock meet the FSA guidelines to avoid additional cost at slaughter.