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Developing measures to audit welfare of cattle and pigs at slaughter

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Abstract

Since 1999, animal welfare auditing programmes that utilise five numerically scored core criteria have been used successfully by major restaurant chains to monitor animal welfare in slaughter plants. They had to achieve specific numerical scores in order to remain on the approved supplier list. The five numerically scored criteria (critical control points) are: i) Percentage of animals that fall down during handling; ii) Percentage of animals moved with an electric prod; iii) Percentage of cattle or pigs vocalising in the stunning box or restrainer; iv) Percentage of animals stunned effectively with one application of the stunner; and v) Percentage rendered insensible when hoisted to the bleed rail (has to be 100% to pass the audit). Audit data collected in 2010 by two restaurant companies in 30 beef plants, indicated that 77% of them effectively stunned 100 to 99% of the cattle with a single shot from a captive-bolt gun. All 30 plants passed the audit, which required 95% or more of the cattle stunned with one shot. In eight pork plants with electric stunning, the tongs were placed correctly on 100% of the pigs held in a V-conveyor restrainer. In 95% of the beef plants, and 86% of 25 pork plants, 0% of the animals fell during unloading, movement in the lairage and during handling in the stunning area. In 81% of the beef plants and 77% of the pork plants, 5% or less of the animals were moved with an electric prod. The percentage of cattle vocalising in the stun box and during movement into the stun box was 3% or less in all the plants except one. All scores are per animal, an animal is stunned correctly in the first shot, or not stunned correctly. It either vocalises or it is silent. A passing score is required on all five of the numerically scored core criteria. Due to financial and time constraints, the same auditor assesses both welfare and food safety. Workshops for training auditors last 1.5 days and include two plant visits.

Keywords: animal welfare, audits, cattle, pigs, slaughter, stunning