WSPA and APSRI humane slaughter programme in China: STEPS®

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Abstract

The adoption of slaughter and pre-slaughter techniques to improve animal welfare and meat quality and safety is dependent on providing appropriate information, application and enforcement as well as information ownership by local people. The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and Beijing Chaoyang Anhua Animal Product Safety Research Institute (APSRI) have been running a humane slaughter programme in China for more than three years. The aim of the programme is to improve the welfare of animals slaughtered in China through a three-pronged approach: i) train core-plant mid-level managers to be humane slaughter trainers; ii) provide guidance on legislation and codes of practice; and iii) develop and implement pre-slaughter and slaughter animal welfare curricula for undergraduate veterinarians. The production of in-country training material is based on a training-needs analysis conducted prior to the programme. Four Chinese trainers have completed the training and become national level trainers. In the last three years they have trained more than 5,000 staff from 800 slaughterhouses. Technical standards for slaughtering pigs, based on those of the OIE, have been adopted in China and the veterinary curriculum development is progressing. The programme has introduced many positive changes to the Chinese slaughter industry and the signs are positive for good progress.

Keywords: animal welfare, China, humane slaughter, livestock, meat safety, pigs

Introduction

The humane slaughter programme discussed here is a project developed and managed by WSPA and APSRI since December 2007. The programme aims to change the behaviour and attitude of people in China towards animals during pre-slaughter handling and slaughter. The Chinese slaughter industry is the largest in the world with more than 20,000 registered slaughterhouses (Ministry of Commerce of PRC 2007). Although the government legislates on and inspects pig and poultry slaughterhouses, it has incomplete control over other types of plants. More than 90% of cattle and sheep slaughterhouses in China are run by the Muslim minority community (Personal communication, Head of Department of Livestock Slaughtering of Ministry of Commerce of PRC 2007). Furthermore, the industry in China is extremely diverse from both qualitative and quantitative points of view. Small, old-fashioned plants can be observed as well as large modern slaughterhouses.

Following assessments of such issues, the main elements of the WSPA and APSRI humane slaughter programme were decided:

- Lobbying and advising on humane slaughter legislation and codes of practice; and
- Incorporation of animal welfare at pre-slaughter and slaughter into the curricula of undergraduates and postgraduates studying meat science and veterinary science.

Training-needs analysis

China is divided into geographical and political units. It consists of 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities and two special administrative regions, with slaughterhouses mostly concentrated in central and southern provinces. The pilot training programme was conducted in the province of Henan, as it had favourable conditions and infrastructure.

The most challenging area of work related to the humane slaughter training of slaughterhouse staff and inspectors. The Chinese slaughter industry employs more than 1,500,000 workers (Ministry of Commerce of PRC 2007), of which about 150,000 work in pre-slaughter and slaughter. These 150,000 workers were considered the key target audience.

The training-needs analysis visits defined several main animal-welfare-related problems: unsuitable design of unloading premises and rough unloading of animals, lack of...