The compatibility of modern slaughter techniques with halal slaughter: a review of the aspects of ‘modern’ slaughter methods that divide scholarly opinion within the Muslim community

A Fuseini*†§, SB Wotton†, PJ Hadley‡ and TG Knowles†

† School of Veterinary Science, University of Bristol, Langford, Bristol BS40 5DU, UK
‡ AHDB, Creech Castle, Taunton, Somerset TA1 2DX, UK
§ AHDB, Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2TL, UK
* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: awalfus@yahoo.com

Abstract

The continuous expansion of the global halal meat market has attracted interest from governments, food business operators and the animal and meat science research fraternity. Despite this growing trend, and the enormous economic benefits associated with it, there is a lack of clarity regarding what is ‘authentic’ halal. Many Islamic jurists are reluctant to approve animal slaughter methods that were not practiced at the time of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed. Others insist that since Islam holds animal welfare in high regard, any modern method of slaughter that is shown to improve animal welfare without compromising on the basic requirements of halal slaughter can be approved for halal production. This paper highlights the aspects of modern slaughter that continues to divide scholarly opinion among Islamic jurists. It also examines the arguments put forward by opponents and proponents regarding the acceptability of modern slaughter techniques for halal slaughter.

Keywords: animal welfare, bleeding-out, halal slaughter; mechanical slaughter, pre-slaughter stunning, thoracic sticking

Introduction

Animals have been slaughtered for food since time immemorial. Despite the emphasis on the humaneness of slaughter today, it has been reported that less attention was paid to the humaneness of the slaughter techniques used in recent centuries (MacLachlan 2006; Zivotofsky & Strous 2012). It should be borne in mind that, at that time, there was no stunning equipment because the science of animal behaviour and our understanding of animal welfare were still in their infancy in comparison with present day knowledge in these fields of science. MacLachlan (2006) noted that in most countries, rapid urbanisation resulted in increased consumption of meat. This led to an increase in the reported incidence of cruelty to animals in slaughterhouses, leading to an increased public concern for the welfare of food animals. Public concern for the welfare of animals in Western societies in the eighteenth century led to a diminishing view on anthropocentrism among the general population (Thomas 1984).

Advances in the science of animal behaviour and sentience over the years, aimed at eliminating avoidable pain and distress, have led to improvements in the handling and techniques of slaughter of food animals. Whilst these changes have been incorporated into conventional slaughter procedures, some religious authorities have foregone the adoption of certain aspects of improved slaughter methods because they are apparently inconsistent with their beliefs (ASIDCOM Association 2010; Halal Monitoring Committee [HMC] 2016). In most developed countries, there have been a series of animal welfare regulations implemented over the years to protect the welfare of animals during slaughter (eg The Humane Slaughter Act 1958; EC 1099/2009). These animal welfare policies are usually mandatory during conventional slaughter, however, during religious slaughter, there are exemptions regarding the use of modern slaughter technologies (eg pre-slaughter stunning). For instance, EC 1099/2009 permits member states to exercise an exemption that allows the slaughter of animals without stunning for people of faith (usually Muslims and Jews). The exemptions are necessitated by the fact that many religious authorities continue to argue that modern slaughter techniques are inconsistent with the teachings of their religious scriptures. It must be reiterated, however, that most of the new slaughter technologies that are the subject of this discussion were developed or discovered many centuries after the religious texts were revealed, it is therefore not surprising that they are not mentioned in any of the religious literature. Nonetheless, a large proportion of Islamic scholars in the UK are of the view that the