

Charging arrangements for official controls

All FBOs received a letter (29 June 2009) updating them on the decisions made recently by the FSA concerning charging. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) launched a consultation in December 2008 on the charging arrangements and charging levels for official meat controls that the MHS carries out in approved meat premises. The result of the consultation, which closed on 25 March 2009, was considered by the FSA Board at their meeting on 21 April 2009.

It has been decided, with the agreement of Ministers in all four UK countries, to proceed with the introduction of a new system of calculating charges for meat hygiene and animal welfare at slaughter official controls. The new system will base charges on the time cost of the inspection process at meat businesses. The new arrangements will take effect from 28 September 2009 in Great Britain (27 September in Northern Ireland) rather than from 29 June as was originally proposed. Increases to charges and some other measures that the FSA proposed are not being introduced at this time. This means that, if official control time remains unchanged, FBOs will not face an increase in the charges when time-based charging is introduced. Charges could be lower if official control time is reduced in specific premises. An updated copy of the MHS Charges Guide will be issued to you closer to the introduction of the new arrangements.

Merger of the MHS with the FSA

A letter was sent recently (13 July 2009) to all FBOs informing them that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) had announced that planning for the formal merger of the FSA and the MHS would commence shortly. The operational work of the MHS will form the core of a new FSA Operations Group. This announcement will not affect the service delivered by the MHS and business as usual will continue.

The FSA and MHS have been working for some considerable time to bring the two organisations closer together. Real progress has been made in modernising frontline MHS operational services and its management structure, and also on integrating the FSA and MHS corporate service functions. The FSA Directors, including Steve McGrath, MHS Chief Executive, agreed that the next logical step is the formal merger of the two organisations. Formal processes will now commence to start the merger and a more detailed timetable will be published later in the year. It is expected that the move to the new arrangements will start from April 2010, with a further year needed to fully complete the transition process. Steve McGrath, MHS Chief Executive said "I am fully supportive of the planned changes which will allow the merged organisation to build on the significant improvements delivered through the MHS Transformation programme. I see the merger as an opportunity for further improvements to operational service delivery. In the meantime I would like to reassure Food Business Operators that it's business as usual". We will ensure that Food Business Operators and industry stakeholders are kept fully informed of progress in the coming months.

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MHS Contingency Plan for Pandemic Flu outbreak

The MHS has a robust Contingency Plan for the handling of a Pandemic Flu outbreak. The plan has been drawn up in consultation with a cross-section of MHS staff including Directors, members of the Risk Management Group and Operational Managers. Industry representative organisations have been briefed on the main features of the MHS Pandemic Flu Contingency Plan. The plan is designed to ensure, as far as possible, the continuation of MHS service delivery to industry.

The MHS plan provides a framework that enables the MHS to take key decisions at the appropriate time. It aims to help the GB meat industry to process as many animals as possible in full compliance with food safety and animal welfare legislation during an outbreak which may result in high levels of MHS and FBO staff absence.

The main features of the plan include:

- protecting animal welfare, not just in approved premises but also in the chain leading back to the producer
- making the most effective use of MHS inspection staff who are available for work
- working with industry to ensure minimum disruption to production levels in approved premises
- doing all that is possible to ensure equitable treatment of any sector, or individual operator within the meat industry.

All FBOs are urged to remind their own staff of the health protection measures recommended by the Government. Together we can take the actions necessary to limit the spread of the current flu outbreak amongst all staff working in approved meat establishments.



Transfer of responsibility for the approval of meat establishments

As part of the drive to improve delivery, the FSA announced in February that it is to amend the existing arrangements in Great Britain for the approval of meat establishments.

From 1 October 2009 the MHS team led by Jane Downes, Veterinary & Technical Director, will assume responsibility in Great Britain for the approval of new premises, the review of approvals and where necessary, the withdrawal or suspension of an approval. Three Veterinary Meat Hygiene Advisers from the FSA will transfer to the MHS team and will continue to work in this important area.



Jane Downes
MHS Veterinary & Technical
Director

The administration of this work will be undertaken in York and new contact arrangements will be published in due course.

The approval delivery arrangements in Northern Ireland will remain unchanged, with the FSA Northern Ireland Director retaining responsibility and authority for granting, reviewing, suspending, and withdrawing approval through on-site assessment visits by veterinarians from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Northern Ireland).

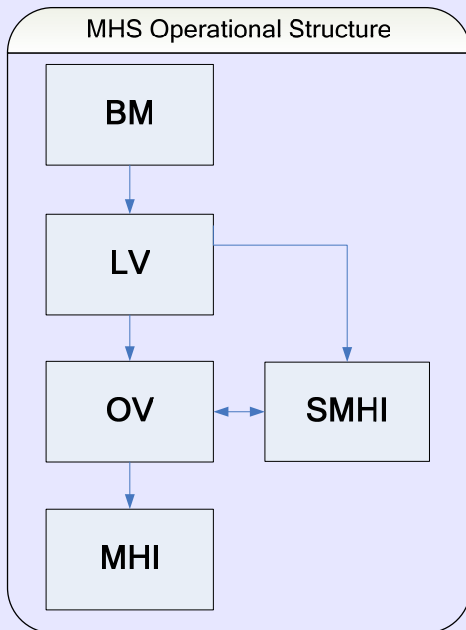
Jane Downes, MHS Veterinary and Technical Director, will be responsible for ensuring the consistency of approvals delivery throughout the UK.

MHS operational teams working well under the new structure

In recent months Food Business Operators may have noticed a number of changes to the way their MHS team works. As reported in issue 11 of Link, the MHS's new operational management structure was fully implemented in February 2009. The new structure aims to promote closer working relationships with FBOs and aims to deliver greater flexibility and accountability at a local level.

Geoff Ogle and Peter Styler, our two Business Directors, cover the North and South of Great Britain respectively. They have overall responsibility for all aspects of operational delivery which is managed at a local level through 12 Business Managers. Each Business Manager manages a

number of clusters and provides the link between locally-based operational staff and central services provided by MHS headquarters. Lead Veterinarians (LVs) are responsible for ensuring technical compliance and Official Veterinarian (OV) standards, providing advice and directing improvements for each team based in a cluster. It also means that LVs can enter premises at any time to monitor compliance and standards. OVs are now the team leader for Meat Hygiene Inspectors working in approved meat premises. They are supported by their Senior Meat Hygiene Inspector.



Elvira Diez, Lead Veterinarian in Cluster 26, gave her views on the changes to operational teams: "I took a moment recently to reflect on the massive amount of change that has taken place over the past year. Since the Transformation process began, the MHS has made a number of radical changes, and I've



Elvira Diez
Lead Veterinarian

been impressed by how quickly staff have adapted. Although the full complement of LVs has only been in place for a short time, I know they are already making a real difference on the ground. Front-line staff are adapting well and have been making good use of the new resource available to them.

Working as a close-knit team with the other LVs, OVs, Senior MHIs and MHIs has been greatly beneficial, especially in terms of knowledge sharing. We want to forge a strong relationship with FBOs to ensure that we deliver an efficient and high quality service".

Charter Mark success

The MHS is pleased to announce that, it has again been successful in maintaining Charter Mark accreditation.

Charter Mark is the Government standard for excellence in customer service. During his 2009 assessment, the Assessor took into account the many improvements in service delivery to FBOs and stakeholders under the Transformation programme.

The Assessor also spent a day at two separate meat establishments to hear first-hand from FBOs about their experiences of advice, support and assistance given by MHS headquarters and operational staff.



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

MHS performance against targets

At the end of the first quarter of 2009/10, MHS performance is on track to achieve our Key Performance Indicators, as detailed in the MHS Plan 2009/10.

We remain committed to transforming into a more efficient and effective organisation. The streamlining of our corporate service functions is progressing well, and we are aiming to reduce our overhead costs by 5% during this financial year. Following the announcement of the formal merger of MHS and FSA on 9 July, we will be reviewing how this impacts on MHS operations and will continue to work with stakeholders to maximise the effectiveness of our service delivery.

Our financial position remains good. Gross costs are currently running 3% below budget at £16.8m against the year to date budget of £17.1. Net costs are on target at £6.1m.

As at 31 May, Cost Per Livestock Unit was £11.13, 1% above the year end target of £11.00. This was due to a 5% fall in livestock units during May.

Work to monitor consistency in post mortem inspection has been taken forward through the use of post mortem effectiveness surveys. The baseline surveys for all species have now been completed. A project is currently underway to establish a system of performance checks on an ongoing basis.

Work is progressing well on a Compliance and Enforcement Strategy. Initial feedback from industry stakeholders has been broadly supportive. Baselines are being established to identify those premises which require intervention, and monitoring will commence shortly.

During the first quarter of the financial year, there have been three breaches. Two Over 48 month bovines were not tested for BSE prior to being released into the human food chain and a SRM breach occurred where the vertebral column of an Over 30 month bovine was not removed prior to being released to the cutting plant. All 3 breaches have been investigated. The FBOs concerned have been reminded of their responsibility regarding TSE and SRM controls.

As at 30 June, the average working days lost per staff member due to sickness absence was 10.7 against a target of 10.4 days. The MHS remains committed to further reducing sickness absence.

The MHS has successfully retained the accreditation of the Jobcentre Plus 'Two Ticks' symbol. The 'Two Ticks' symbol is awarded to employers who have agreed to take action to meet specific commitments regarding the employment, retention, training and career development of disabled employees.



Whilst we are pleased that performance for the first quarter of 2009/10 is on track to meet its Key Performance Indicators, we are not complacent and are continuing to work with stakeholders to meet or better our targets.

¹ The CPLU is calculated by dividing total gross MHS costs (for all industry and government activity) by the total livestock units.

Food fraud scam

The FSA and police have previously issued warnings regarding unsafe meat and fish that is being sold cheaply to cash-and-carry outlets, wholesalers and the catering industry. Seven men thought to be part of a food-fraud syndicate have already been arrested and an investigation is under way into how a gang allegedly stole the identity of a legitimate company and used fake letterheads to order vast quantities of food and soft drinks from traders in Britain and on the Continent.



Beware of unsafe food products

The authorities are concerned that food obtained by the gang is not being kept refrigerated. Scores of food

companies have been deceived and are now owed thousands of pounds. The perpetrators are thought to have inside knowledge of the food industry. In this case, the gang placed an order, claiming to be acting on behalf of a business called "Tri-Imp", a legitimate Bradford trader who has operated for 26 years. Food companies with whom orders have been placed are thought to have carried out routine credit checks on Tri-Imp Ltd, which has a genuine high rating. Delivery dates were agreed, but the rogue operators concealed their identity by changing delivery locations at the last minute. Investigators said that one of the fraudsters' tactics was to contact delivery vehicle drivers to arrange pick-ups at lay-bys or car parks. Some cheques offered in payment for the items - many

from stolen cheque books - have bounced. The legitimate trader has been inundated with invoices from food companies across Britain, demanding payment for goods that he has not ordered. The Tri-Imp website carries a warning that the company identity and name is being used unlawfully. The MD of the genuine Tri-Imp Ltd, which imports fresh produce from Asia, is concerned that his business is being destroyed.

The Spanish company, Enric Roca SA, received a request for a consignment of chicken breasts. The manager used the internet to check the British company, but was suspicious when the telephone number in the e-mail was different from that on the website. The criminals placed their order under the name of the Chairman of Tri-Imp, now semi-retired and living in Pakistan. The matter was reported to the Spanish police, as the crime was committed in Spain.

West Yorkshire Police's Economic Unit are leading the investigation with FSA officers. The trail has so far taken them to Essex, East Sussex, Lancashire and Yorkshire. Food businesses should be wary of cheap food offers; especially as the safety of the product could be in question. The seven men, aged between 19 and 44, from Brighton, Bradford, Dewsbury and Wakefield, have been arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to defraud and money laundering. No charges have been brought and the men are on police bail.



Short Introduction - Edible Co-Products

In August 2006 the FSA issued the Industry Guide on Edible Co-products to explain the legislative requirements that apply to these important but lesser known products of the meat industry. 'Edible Co-Products' should not be confused with animal by-products (materials not intended for human consumption), or with 'edible by-products' or 'by-products'. Since the introduction of the Industry Guide on Edible Co-Products and its promotion by Eblex, FSA and the MHS, more FBOs are considering handling edible co-products (ECoPs) to maximise their business potential. As a consequence, industry has expressed a need for a short reference document which sets out the main points covered by the detailed Guide. The Short Introduction is a practical summary of the guidance provided in Chapters 1 to 4 of the Guide. The FSA have sent a copy of the 'Short Introduction' to all FBOs and Local Authorities and have recently posted the document on its website at:

www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/introedibleprod.pdf

Selection and submission of TB samples

Animal Health and the MHS are looking at the possibility of formally transferring TB sample and submission responsibilities to the MHS. A trial is taking place in five slaughterhouses to support the research.



For TB disease management purposes, Animal Health currently collects samples taken from all TB reactor cattle and 'Slaughterhouse Case' animals killed in approved slaughterhouses. Animal Health then records the post mortem findings and selects and submits chosen samples to the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) for culture and disease confirmation.

The MHS already carries out post mortem inspection in slaughterhouses. The transfer of responsibility would include the recording of post mortem results and the selection and submission to the VLA of the chosen samples. Sample selection would follow Animal Health instructions. This would apply to TB reactor cattle and to Slaughterhouse Case animals where there is clinical suspicion of TB.

Transferring responsibility would be an opportunity to standardise procedure, clarify responsibilities and reduce duplication in cross agency activities. The trial began in April and will run to the end of August, and will test the new instructions, training and process steps. The trial also aims to ensure ongoing effective disease management with appropriate quality controls in place.

The trial stage will be closely monitored and on completion, a cross-agency decision will be made on whether to go ahead and move to full implementation of the transfer of responsibility.

If you would like more information about the trial, please contact:

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New classification for poultry by-products

Certain Poultry meat and offal which are not fit for human consumption may now be classified as Category 3 by-products and may be used in the production of pet food.

The following rejected meat can be treated as Category 3 provided it has been subject to an official post-mortem inspection and has no signs of disease or other reasons for rejection:

- Product passed as fit for human consumption that subsequently falls on the floor but is not visibly soiled or otherwise contaminated
- Post-mortem rejections caused by the slaughterhouse process
- Product that, although fit for human consumption, the FBO does not intend to enter into the food chain (e.g. runts, carcasses partially affected by abnormalities once abnormalities are removed)
- Clean bruises and fractures (with no secondary infection)
- Meat contaminated with upper digestive tract spillage or bile staining during the slaughterhouse process
- Carcasses with ascites when condition caused by cardiac insufficiency – please consult the OV for further information on this condition.



The OV will verify that animal by-products have been categorised correctly, and take action in accordance with the hierarchy of enforcement when deficiencies are noted.

FBOs must indicate in their procedures how animal by-products will be categorized, separated, stained and dispatched.

Contact us

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MHS Communications.



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The Meat Hygiene Service is an executive
agency of the Food Standards Agency

