

Update on handover arrangements for the transfer of Catering Butchers from Local Authority to MHS control

Issue

1. To provide an update to the MHS Board on the use of employed veterinarians for the audit of food business operator food safety management systems in catering butchers, as and when they are approved as cutting plants, and transfer from Local Authority to MHS control.

Background

2. In September 2006, the MHS Board agreed that MHS employed veterinarians should undertake the audit role in catering butchers to ensure that high risk establishments handling both raw meat and cooked meat products are under direct Competent Authority control.
3. An MHS working group was set up in November 2006 to ensure that the necessary handover arrangements were in place for the transfer of catering butchers to the MHS.
4. As part of an updated approval strategy, the FSA is prioritising approval visits to higher risk establishments which process fresh meat *and* ready-to-eat products. These include cutting plants also producing ready-to-eat meat products, with the MHS role extending to these ready-to-eat products at re-approval; and catering butchers processing ready-to-eat meat products, with these premises new to MHS control.
5. Due to a lack of detailed information coming from Food Business Operators and the Local Authorities, the FSA is still uncertain about the number of catering butchers that are expected to require approval, the

type of products that they are processing and the scale of their operations. These points and an establishment's readiness for approval and therefore the timing of the transfer to MHS control, can only be determined at the initial FSA approval visit. These issues are preventing the MHS determining with any accuracy the resources and skills required to audit the premises and the likely income and budgetary implications.

6. The FSA has informed MHS that approximately 320 catering butchers in Great Britain are expected to require approval. Of those, the FSA has positively identified that only a small proportion (around 24) are handling raw meat *and* cooked meat products and would be defined as 'high risk' premises. However, as the FSA only has limited information to draw on at the current time, the actual number of 'high risk' premises will undoubtedly be higher.
7. There are a number of catering butchers that are not involved in the manufacturing of meat products and only cut meat or produce minced meat and/or meat preparations. The work and risk assessment for these are the same as for the cutting plants / co-located minced meat and meat preparations plants already under MHS control.
8. On this risk assessment, the MHS recommends that catering butchers that do *not* manufacture meat products may be audited by Official Veterinarians (OV) supplied by veterinary contractors.
9. To ensure that the MHS has a sufficient pool of adequately trained veterinarians to undertake the audit role in the 'high risk' catering butchers which do handle raw meat *and* ready-to-eat meat products as they transfer, all employed veterinarians will attend a two-day course provided by Reading Scientific Services Ltd. Five courses are scheduled to run during February to April 2007.
10. All employed and contract OVs will attend a training day during April to June 2007 which will include a module on minced meat, meat preparations

and meat products. This will meet the MHS contractual arrangements for training of contract veterinarians and comply with legal requirements to maintain OV knowledge.

11. The effects of taking these additional premises on MHS resources and on the financial position will be monitored throughout the transfer period.
12. At re-approval, the MHS is also taking on the audit and enforcement responsibility for meat products where the premises are co-located with approved cutting plants. As these may be handling raw meat *and* cooked meat products, they are also considered 'high risk' premises. Throughout the course of 2006, some 25 of the 48 or so cutting plants identified by the FSA as having co-located meat product plants were re-approved.
13. At these premises, the existing OV contracts with veterinary contractors, which are due to run to March 2008, are being amended so that veterinary contractors are responsible for the official controls. This is subject to confirmation that the OV has the relevant training and competences. However, given that these are 'high risk' premises, this approach may be returned to when the model for the delivery of official controls has been agreed.

Recommendations

14. MHS Board members are invited to:
 - i) **Note** that, as previously agreed by the MHS Board, MHS employed veterinarians will undertake the audit role in catering butchers to ensure that high risk establishments handling both raw meat and cooked meat products are under direct Competent Authority control.

- ii) **Note** the MHS intention to use contract veterinarians for the audit role in catering butchers that only handle fresh meat, minced meat and meat preparations.

- iii) **Note** adequately trained and competent contract OVs will audit in meat product plants co-located with cutting plants for which they hold the contract, upon transfer of responsibility from Local Authorities.

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