

Section 12
Standards for the slaughter of farmed livestock
(inc. poultry)

12.0 Contents Page

This Section explains the requirements for organic certification of slaughterhouses, for both red meat animals and poultry. A slaughterhouse registered with OF&G must comply with the organic regulations in addition to all other relevant legislation and industry good practice, with the welfare of the animals being paramount.

Section	Contents	Page
12.1	Introduction	3
12.2	Summary of Additional Requirements for Organic Certification	3
12.3	Specific Exclusions	3
12.4	Responsibility of Welfare; Enforcements of the Regulations	4
12.5	Transport	4
12.6	Unloading	5
12.7	Design and Maintenance of the Slaughterhouse	5
12.8	Lairage	5
12.9	Sick or Injured Animals	6
12.10	Handling Aids and Goads	6
12.11	Stunning and Killing Equipment	6
12.12	Stunning and Killing Cattle	7
12.13	Stunning and Killing Sheep and Pigs	7
12.14	Specific Requirements of Poultry Slaughter	8
12.15	Stunning to Bleeding Intervals and Methods of Bleeding	9
12.16	Assessment of Unconsciousness	10
12.17	Licensing, Training and Staffing	10
12.18	Animal Welfare Officers	10
12.19	Level of Veterinary Supervision	10

12.20	Good Hygiene Practice in the Slaughterhouse	10
12.21	Traceability	11
12.22	Contingency Planning	11

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12.1 Introduction

12.1.01	<p>Requirements for the slaughter of organic livestock are not detailed in the OF&G Standards because there are comprehensive and detailed regulations in the UK for the slaughter of all farmed animals, whether organic or not.</p> <p>These regulations stress the importance of providing good welfare for animals, up to and including the time of slaughter. They also set out general hygiene rules (based on HACCP), training, cleaning, structural and maintenance requirements.</p> <p>For organic certification, there must also be compliance with organic requirements at all stages in the slaughter process. (See Section 12.2.01 below)</p>
12.1.02	<p>A slaughterhouse registered with OF&G for slaughter of organic livestock must be aware of and comply with all relevant legislation and industry good practice, with the welfare of the animals being paramount.</p> <p>At every premises there must be a member of staff who has been trained in animal welfare and who is responsible for safeguarding animal welfare.</p> <p>Anyone handling live animals or carrying out stunning or sticking, must have the knowledge, skill and equipment to perform the task humanely and efficiently. This will ensure that the animals are not subjected to avoidable excitement, pain or suffering at any time.</p>

12.2 Summary of Additional Requirements for Organic Certification

12.2.01	<p>In addition to the legislation and recommendations detailed in Sections 12.1.01 and 12.1.02 above, an organic slaughterhouse must comply with the requirements of Section 11 of this Manual, 'Operational Requirements for Organic Processing Operations'. These, as they apply to abattoirs, are summarised below.</p> <p>Each slaughterhouse must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Have a written procedure for the slaughter of organic livestock; (ii) Ensure that staff are trained to understand the organic requirements. This training should be documented and staff monitored to ensure they comply; (iii) Check proof of organic status and maintain traceability of animals from intake through to despatch of carcasses or butchered meat. (An 'organic' stamp for carcasses is available from OF&G.); (iv) Ensure that organic animals are kept separate from non-organic livestock at delivery, intake and during lairage and slaughter; (v) Ensure that organic carcasses and the meat subsequently butchered from them are kept separate at all times from non-organic carcasses and meat. Details of time of slaughter and pre-cleaning must be recorded; (vi) Rinse all cleaning chemicals from product contact surfaces (including knives) before organic processing commences; (vii) Ensure that only approved pest control chemicals are used and that these do not contaminate meat or packaging materials.
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12.3 Specific Exclusions

12.3.01	<p>Religious Slaughter: OF&G requires that animals are pre-stunned to render them insensible before being killed, so does not endorse those methods of religious slaughter where the animal is fully sensible when being killed.</p>
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12.3.02	Pre-slaughter Injection with Tenderising Substances: This practice is not allowed.
12.3.03	<p><u>Electric Goads</u>: (Article 18 (4) (889/2008))</p> <p>Loading and unloading of animals shall be carried out without the use of any type of electrical stimulation to coerce the animals. The use of allopathic tranquilisers, prior to or during transport, is prohibited.</p>

12.4 Responsibility for Welfare; Enforcement of the Regulations

12.4.01	<p><i>The welfare of animals in transit is the responsibility of the producer, or the haulier as a sub-contractor of the producer.</i></p> <p><i>Once they enter the curtilage of the slaughterhouse, welfare becomes the joint responsibility of the producer and slaughterhouse.</i></p> <p><i>After unloading, their welfare is the responsibility solely of the slaughterhouse.</i></p>
12.4.02	<p><i>The enforcement of welfare during transit is the duty of the Local Authority or the Animal Health Veterinary Service.</i></p> <p><i>Once unloaded, enforcement of their welfare is the duty of the Official Veterinary Surgeon (OVS).</i></p>

12.5 Transport

12.5.01	No person shall transport any animal in a way that causes, or is likely to cause, injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal.
12.5.02	<p>To achieve the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Animals should have organic food, water and 24 hours rest before starting a journey; (ii) Animals must be fit for the journey; (iii) Competent and trained people should load, transport and unload the animals. This should be done calmly and without rushing; (iv) The vehicle should meet statutory construction requirements and be appropriate for the species transported and for the journey. It should be driven carefully with consideration for the animals. If necessary, the driver should stop to check the animals during the journey; (v) The vehicle should give the animals enough floor space and headroom. It should protect them from the weather and have effective air circulation; (vi) Partitions should be used where necessary, to divide the vehicle (to prevent animals falling or being injured) or to divide separate groups of animals (where different social groups are being transported); (vii) Correct documents must be completed and carried in the vehicle; (viii) Relevant cleaning and disinfection rules must be complied with.
12.5.03	Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations requires that transporters of vertebrate animals are trained in the relevant technical provisions of the Regulation. For transporters they cover: fitness for travel; the means of transport; use of its facilities; loading, unloading and handling; watering and feeding intervals; journey times and rest periods; space allowances; and documentation.

12.5.04	<i>Where animals are sent to market and then directly on to an abattoir, the total time should be taken into account and water and organic feed given if appropriate.</i>
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12.6 Unloading

12.6.01	The slaughterhouse must have suitable equipment and facilities for unloading animals and they should be unloaded with the minimum of delay and without causing stress or suffering.
12.6.02	If delay is unavoidable, livestock must be protected from adverse weather conditions and provided with adequate ventilation.
12.6.03	<i>Animals should ideally be able to walk off wagons onto a secure level area leading directly into the lairage, avoiding any sharp turns. (Animals dislike going downhill and they risk injury from jumping, slipping or falling.)</i>
12.6.04	<i>A designated and competent member of staff should assess the health and well-being of the animals on arrival.</i>
12.6.05	<i>There may be a need for immediate slaughter, where an animal is injured, or for isolation where animals are suspected of disease. (Investigations should follow in both cases.)</i>
12.6.06	<i>There may exceptionally be occasions (e.g. due to traffic problems or breakdowns in the slaughter line) when animals have to stay in the delivery wagon, but alternative arrangements should be made wherever possible.</i>

12.7 Design and Maintenance of the Slaughterhouse

12.7.01	The construction, facilities, equipment and operations must be such as to spare animals any avoidable excitement, pain, injury or suffering. Floors should be non-slip in all areas. The place of killing should be sited so as to minimise the handling of animals at any time up to the point of killing.
12.7.02	<i>Ideally animals should be moved from the unloading bay to the holding pen and on to the stunning/slaughter area as directly as possible. There should be as few turns and corners as possible and the route the animals take should encourage forward movement.</i>

12.8 Lairage

12.8.01	<i>Optimum lairage times vary according to type of animal, but as a general rule, they should be as short as possible and lairage capacity should be matched to the throughput of the slaughterhouse.</i>
12.8.02	Every animal should be protected from adverse weather conditions and provided with adequate ventilation. (Note: Ventilation should ensure that temperature, humidity and ammonia levels are kept within limits that are not harmful to animals.)
12.8.03	Water must be available to all animals at all times in the lairage.
12.8.04	A sufficient quantity of wholesome feed should be given on arrival and twice daily thereafter, but not within 12 hours of slaughter.

12.8.05	The feed should be organic and records should be kept to prove organic status and quantity of feed given.
12.8.06	Animals should have sufficient space to stand up, lie down and turn around without difficulty when penned. Any animal that is tethered should be able to stand up and lie down without difficulty.
12.8.07	An adequate supply of suitable bedding must be provided for all animals kept in lairage overnight, unless the lairage has a slatted or mesh floor.
12.8.08	Where a field is used as lairage, the animals should be checked regularly and provided with water, organic feed and protection from adverse weather.
12.8.09	Any animals that might injure each other on account of their sex, age, origin or any other reason should be kept and lairaged apart from each other.
12.8.10	Organic animals must be kept separately from other animals, in pens clearly labelled 'organic'.
12.8.11	<p><i>Handling for identification:</i></p> <p>Cattle: <i>All cattle should be checked to ensure the passport corresponds with the animal's ear tag. Mouths of cattle may also need to be checked to confirm age. The additional handling required for this identification causes additional stress, so care should be taken.</i></p> <p>Pigs: <i>All pigs being moved to slaughter must be identified by either an eartag or a tattoo containing the Defra herdmark or a slapmark. A slapmark must be legible on each shoulder area of the pig.</i></p> <p><i>Pigs going to slaughter must use an eartag capable of surviving the processing of the carcass following slaughter.</i></p>

12.9 Sick or injured animals

12.9.01	<p>The condition and health of all animals should be inspected on arrival at the slaughterhouse and subsequently at least every morning and evening by a competent person.</p> <p>Any animal judged to be sick or injured should be kept apart from other animals and stunned and slaughtered without delay.</p>
12.9.02	Any animals too young to take solid feed should be slaughtered immediately after arrival at the slaughterhouse.

12.10 Handling Aids and Goads

12.10.01	OF&G does not sanction the use of electric goads. (See Section 12.3.03)
12.10.02	<i>Other, more benign methods of encouraging livestock to move (e.g. flags, flappers, pig boards) should not be used inappropriately.</i>

12.11 Stunning and Killing Equipment

12.11.01	No person shall stun, slaughter or kill, or cause or permit to be stunned, slaughtered or killed, any animal without restraining it in an appropriate manner in such a way as to spare it any avoidable pain, suffering, agitation, injury or contusions.
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12.11.02	<i>Animal welfare legislation prescribes permitted methods of stunning and killing and lays down specific requirements for their operation. The equipment must be suitable and well maintained. It must be operated by trained competent personnel who must ensure that an effective stun is achieved and that the animal is then bled before recovering consciousness.</i>
12.11.03	<i>Suitable spare equipment must be kept for emergency use at the site where stunning / killing takes place. This equipment should be kept well-maintained and easily accessible for the areas where it may be required (unloading, lairage and slaughter line).</i>
12.11.04	<i>The Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVS) has to make an assessment, once the equipment is installed, that it is capable of producing the required stun or kill. The maintenance schedule should be relevant to the operation of the equipment and maintenance records should be kept.</i>
12.11.05	Monitoring of stunning: The slaughterhouse operator should ensure that the stunning / killing process is monitored and this monitoring should be audited by the OVS.

12.12 Stunning and Killing Cattle

12.12.01	<i>Cattle should not be allowed to enter the stunning box unless staff are ready to stun and slaughter immediately.</i>
12.12.02	<i>Floors within the stunning box should be level with no obstructions or steps that tend to contribute to levels of distress. Distractions such as plastic curtains, light, noise or air currents, both at the point of entry and within the box itself may hinder animals entering the box or interfere with restraint of the head or stunning itself.</i>
12.12.03	Animals must be bled without delay after being stunned. The bleeding must be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Rapid, profuse and complete; (ii) Must be completed before the animal regains consciousness; (iii) Must be carried out by severing at least one of the carotid arteries or the vessels from which they arise.
12.12.04	<i>No further dressing procedure may be carried out on the animal before bleeding has ended and in any event, in not less than 20 seconds after sticking for sheep, goats and pigs and 30 seconds for cattle.</i>

12.13 Stunning and Killing Sheep and Pigs

12.13.01	<i>Group stunning pens: These are used for sheep, pigs, calves and goats where animals are to be stunned with either a captive bolt or head-only electrical methods. The pen should not be so full that it is difficult for the operators to move freely or position the stunning equipment accurately that may cause accidental pre-stun shocks. The operators should move quietly and gently so as not to agitate the animals.</i>
12.13.02	<i>Automated restrainers and conveyors: These are used in large through-put abattoirs and should be carefully designed and operated to minimise stress to the animals. Animals should not be left waiting in the pre-stun race or in the restrainer.</i>

12.13.03	<i>Head-only electrical stunning is mainly used for sheep and pigs. A successful stun is heavily dependent on the skill of the operator in positioning the electrodes accurately and delivering sufficient current to render the animal unconscious. The performance of the operator, design of the electrodes (tongs), maintenance of equipment, layout of the stunning pens and number of animals being handled will all affect the efficiency of the operation. This should be closely monitored and immediate action taken where necessary.</i>
12.13.04	<p>GAS-KILLING SYSTEMS FOR PIGS</p> <p>The killing of pigs by exposure to carbon dioxide (CO₂) is permitted under current EU and UK legislation. However high concentrations of CO₂ can cause distress to the animals, so OF&G will need to see evidence that the procedure has been designed to minimise stress before approving this method of slaughter.</p>
12.13.05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The pigs should be rendered rapidly unconscious by the gas; (ii) An irreversible state of unconsciousness (death) must be reached in all pigs prior to sticking. (iii) There should be adequate monitoring of the system and efficient evacuation in the event of any system failure.

12.14 Specific requirements for Poultry Slaughter

12.14.01	<p><i>General Welfare:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) <i>There should never be undue delay in lairage – there should be careful management of incoming birds and planning of arrival times to facilitate humane treatment;</i> (ii) <i>Containers should be checked and any injured or trapped birds removed as soon as possible. (Injured birds should be slaughtered immediately);</i> (iii) <i>Birds should be protected from adverse weather conditions and adequate ventilation provided. If slaughter is delayed, they should be provided with feed and water.</i>
12.14.02	<p>Where birds are delivered in containers, these containers should be handled with care and not thrown, dropped or turned over.</p> <p>Where appropriate, the birds should be unloaded from the containers individually.</p>
12.14.03	<i>It is recommended that birds are unloaded in subdued lighting and that there are no sudden loud noises.</i>
12.14.04	The shackle line, machine or other equipment should be designed for the type, size and weight of birds to be slaughtered.
12.14.05	Shackle lines should be designed to keep birds clear of any obstruction, reduce disturbance to a minimum and the whole length should be immediately accessible so that any bird can receive attention if necessary.
12.14.06	Lines should run at a pace that avoids injury to birds and allows the operator to be certain that effective stunning and cutting has taken place, or to take necessary remedial action

12.14.07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Broken or mis-shapen shackles may not be used; (ii) Birds should be hung by both legs and precautions taken to stop birds escaping, once suspended; (iii) Birds with broken legs must never be hung on shackles, they must be slaughtered immediately; (iv) No birds may be hung for more than 2 minutes before slaughter, other than turkeys which may be hung for up to 3 minutes.
12.14.08	<p><u>Requirements for Waterbath Stunning</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The level of water in the waterbath must be adjusted to ensure there is good contact with each bird's head; (ii) The strength and duration of the current used should be such that the bird is immediately rendered unconscious and remains so until it is dead; (iii) Where poultry are stunned in groups in a water bath, a voltage sufficient to produce a current strong enough to ensure that every bird is stunned should be maintained; (iv) Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that the current passes efficiently, in particular that there are good electrical contacts and that the shackle-to-leg contact is kept wet; (v) The waterbath must be adequate in size and depth for the type of bird being stunned; (vi) The waterbath must not overflow at its entrance, or if this is unavoidable, measures must be taken to ensure that no bird receives pre-stun shocks; (vii) The electrode which is immersed in the water should extend the length of the waterbath; (viii) At all times, when birds are slaughtered, there must be someone in attendance to ensure that the stun has been effective, or if not, to kill the bird without delay.
12.14.09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) After stunning, the birds should be bled without delay. (ii) At least one of the carotid arteries, or vessels from which they arise, should be severed.
12.14.10	No further dressing procedure should be carried out before the bleeding has ended and in any event not less than 2 minutes for turkeys or geese, or not less than 90 seconds for other birds.

12.15 Stunning to Bleeding Intervals and Methods of Bleeding

12.15.01	<i>The slaughterhouse should have a code of practice for the maximum stun to bleed times for the methods of stunning used and should monitor procedures to ensure compliance.</i>
12.15.02	<p><i>Electrical head-only stunning is reversible, so any delay in bleeding the animal has serious welfare implications. The stun to bleed interval should not be more than 15 seconds.</i></p> <p><i>OF&G supports this amendment (for pigs and sheep only) provided that for head-only electrical stunning, a maximum stun to bleed time of 15 seconds is achieved.</i></p>
12.15.03	Pithing: <i>It was previously common practice to pith cattle, to ensure unconsciousness and reduce spasms. As a result of BSE, it is now illegal to pith animals whose meat is intended for human consumption. This means that the animal may recover after stunning so it is important that it is bled quickly.</i>
12.15.04	Bleeding: <i>To ensure rapid death, it is current practice in the UK to cut both carotid arteries and jugular veins or do a thoracic stick.</i>

12.16 Assessment of Unconsciousness

12.16.01	Relevant slaughterhouse staff must be trained to recognise the signs of unconsciousness and should do this routinely.
12.16.02	<i>A short checklist of the key signs of unconsciousness should be available for staff.</i>

12.17 Licensing, Training and Staffing

12.17.01	<u>Licensing</u> : In the UK, anyone slaughtering animals needs a certificate of competence issued by an Official Veterinary Surgeon (OVS). This states the operations, species, equipment or instructions for which the applicant has been assessed and licences are only issued for these activities. Once a licence is issued, it is valid for life unless revoked or suspended.
12.17.02	<u>Training</u> : Slaughterhouses should have an appropriate training regime to ensure that all staff are fully competent at their jobs. Welfare of animals at slaughter must form an integral part of this training, for any staff working with live animals. Individual training records should be kept.
12.17.03	<u>Staffing</u> : <i>It is important to have sufficient staff to avoid fatigue on the slaughter line, because this can negatively affect animal welfare. Rotating jobs amongst a small group of fully trained staff may be a useful way of reducing fatigue.</i>

12.18 Animal Welfare Officers

12.18.01	At all times when there are live animals on the premises, there should be a person available who is competent, and who has authority to take whatever action may be necessary to safeguard the welfare of the animals.
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12.19 Level of Veterinary Supervision

12.19.01	The OVS must supervise the ante-mortem inspection and the slaughter process.
12.19.02	<i>Other staff in the slaughterhouse should be trained to carry out other elements of the day to day welfare monitoring.</i>

12.20 Good Hygiene Practice in the Slaughterhouse

12.20.01	Procedures put in place must be based on HACCP principles.
12.20.02	<i>To reduce contamination in the slaughterhouse, only clean animals should be presented for slaughter. (Dirty animals should be cleaned or returned to their owners.)</i>
12.20.03	<p>General good practice to reduce cross-contamination in the slaughterhouse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) <i>All equipment should be kept clean and well-maintained and checked before use to make sure it is functioning and in good condition so as to prevent damage to carcasses;</i> (ii) <i>All cutting equipment should be rinsed and disinfected between carcasses;</i> (iii) <i>Water used for disinfection should be at least 82°C;</i> (iv) <i>All water used should be potable and should be tested monthly;</i> (v) <i>Staff should rinse their hands, arms and aprons, as appropriate, between carcasses;</i> (vi) <i>When carcasses are rinsed, care should be taken to avoid cross-contamination by water sprays;</i>

12.20.03 cont.	<p>(vii) <i>Pigs should be fully bled before scalding to prevent inhalation. The water in the scalding tank should be potable and should be changed frequently to keep it clean;</i></p> <p>(viii) <i>Cattle/sheep: oesophagus should be tied off or clipped and guts should be bunged or sealed to prevent leakage;</i></p>
12.20.04	<p>Specified Risk Material</p> <p>Staff should be fully trained in procedures to remove, stain and dispose of SRM in accordance with the SRM Regulations.</p>

12.21 Traceability

12.21.01	Carcases and cuts must carry a mark that identifies the slaughterhouse where the animals were killed.
12.21.02	All carcases and cuts must be traceable back to the consignment of animals delivered and hence to the producer.
12.21.03	<p>In addition to the traceability requirements in Sections 12.23.01 and 12.23.02 above, all organic carcases and cuts (other than poultry) should be stamped with an 'organic' stamp, (obtainable from OF&G once certification has been awarded).</p> <p>For poultry, this information should be on the packaging or despatch documentation.</p>
12.21.04	If offals are to be sold as organic, they must be kept separate from non-organic offals and be directly traceable back to the batch of organic animals they originated from.

12.22 Contingency Planning

12.22.01	<i>A contingency plan should be in place in the event of a line breakdown, fire, accidents, vehicle breakdowns, and equipment failure etc. that delivers the best welfare outcome for the livestock already in the plant</i>
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