

businesscompanion

trading standards law explained

Home slaughter of cattle

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Although the United Kingdom has left the European Union (EU), certain pieces of legislation (formally known as 'retained EU law') will still apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation; this means that you will still see references to EU regulations in our guidance.

This guidance is for England

Whether or not an owner is permitted to kill cattle for private consumption depends on the cattle's date of birth, whether it has a valid cattle passport, and whether the slaughter takes place outside or inside a licensed slaughterhouse.

There are two lawful ways to have your animals slaughtered and prepared for your own consumption: in an approved slaughterhouse, or on your farm for your own private consumption or that of immediate family living there.

On-farm slaughter of any livestock is an extremely difficult option to achieve legally in terms of food hygiene and BSE controls, and in terms of application of humane methods of restraint, stunning and slaughter. You need to ensure that you dispose of the carcase and any animal waste in accordance with the Regulations.

When were the cattle born?

Before 1 August 1996

Cattle born before 1 August 1996 in the UK do not have passports, only certificates of registration, and they may not be slaughtered for human consumption. All cattle of this age have been restricted under the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2018 to the premises where they were located due to the consequent TSE risk.

Keepers of these cattle have been issued with restriction notices detailing the affected animals. Keepers wishing to move such animals must submit a [movement licence application form](#), completed by both parties involved in the movement, to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) One Health Customer Service Centre in Worcester. If you need help completing the form please contact customeradvice@apha.gov.uk.

Further information on [cattle without passports](#) can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Since 1 August 1996

Cattle born on or after 1 August 1996 can be slaughtered for private consumption whether they have a cattle passport or not.

When an animal is killed outside a licensed slaughterhouse, the keeper must notify its death by completing the death details in the passport and sending it to the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) within seven days.

If an animal does not have a cattle passport and is killed outside a licensed slaughterhouse, the keeper must notify its death to BCMS in writing within seven days; they must include the ear tag number, the date of death and the holding on which it died.

Slaughter in a licensed slaughterhouse can only be carried out if a valid cattle passport accompanies the beast.

Wherever cattle are slaughtered, cattle passports should be returned as normal following the death of the animal.

Slaughter outside a licensed slaughterhouse

Regulation (EC) 853/2004 *laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin* states that in most cases meat for human consumption must be from animals slaughtered in an approved slaughterhouse where slaughter is, amongst other things, subject to inspection and verification by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) (an approved slaughterhouse could include a licensed mobile slaughterhouse). A full [list of meat establishments that are approved to slaughter livestock and/or cut meat](#) can be found on the FSA website; contact details for those wanting further information about approved meat establishments across the UK are also available by following this link.

The FSA advises that advance notice of any home slaughter should be given to the local authority animal health and welfare team, nearest to where the farm is located. If for some reason this is not possible, then

notification should take place within five days following the slaughter of the animal. [Contact details](#) for your local authority can be found on the GOV.UK website.

If you are not prepared to carry out the slaughter process yourself, then you can employ a licensed slaughterer to kill and dress the animal(s) on-farm, under your supervision and responsibility.

It is unlawful to have the animal slaughtered anywhere away from your property, other than in an approved slaughterhouse.

Under Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 it is an offence to sell, or to supply to another person, meat that has not been slaughtered and health-marked in a licensed abattoir. It is for this reason that meat that has been slaughtered on-farm can only be consumed by the owner and their immediate family.

Can I slaughter the cattle myself?

It is lawful for your cattle to be slaughtered on your farm by you, as long as you observe certain requirements.

You must have the necessary skills and training to ensure that you slaughter the animals humanely. Also you need to have the necessary equipment and be sure that you can use it competently.

It is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal.

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Regulations 2015 and Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 *on the protection of animals at the time of killing* create offences for failing to comply with provisions relating to restraining, stunning and killing. Unless you are using a firearm to kill cattle, you must restrain them. The Regulations also make it an offence to cause or permit any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal or bird during the slaughter or killing process.

Under these Regulations, religious slaughter is only permitted in approved slaughterhouses, as all on-farm kills must be stunned before bleeding.

More information on the [legal requirements](#) you will need to comply with for home slaughter can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Detailed information relating to the practical considerations of [captive bolt stunning](#), including equipment, restraint, and bleeding and pithing can be found on the Humane Slaughter Association website.

Information on the [humane killing of livestock using firearms](#) is also available.

Do I need a slaughter licence?

A slaughter licence is not needed when slaughtering your own animal for your own consumption or consumption by your immediate family who live with you. However, certain operations both in slaughterhouses and when carried out on farms for the purpose of killing animals require a certificate of competence (CoC).

If you employ an itinerant slaughterer, they must hold a certificate of competence or a licence for the relevant activities, which indicates that they have the knowledge and skill necessary to perform the tasks humanely and efficiently.

Information on [when a CoC is required and how to obtain one](#) can be found on the GOV.UK website.

BSE testing requirements

A person who has in their possession or under their control the body of a bovine animal that needs to be tested for BSE must, within 24 hours, either:

- make arrangements with another person for that person to collect it and to deliver it to an approved sampling site within 72 hours
 - ... or
- identify an approved sampling site that will carry out the sampling and deliver the animal to that site so as to arrive at the site within 72 hours

If the head of the animal requires testing, the rest must be treated as specified risk material (SRM - see below).

Healthy cattle that were born in Romania or Bulgaria, and were over 30 months old when slaughtered for food, need to be tested for BSE. This does not apply to healthy cattle born in any other EU Member State or the UK.

The following cattle must also test negative for BSE prior to consumption of the meat:

- healthy cattle, born in any non-EU country other than the UK, and aged over 30 months when slaughtered for human consumption
- emergency-slaughter cattle (that is, an otherwise healthy animal that has suffered an accident that prevented its transport to the slaughterhouse), aged over 48 months
- emergency-slaughter cattle, aged over 24 months, and born in Romania, Bulgaria or any non-EU country other than the UK

Cattle requiring BSE testing must test negative before consumption. Meat from the animal should only be consumed if the BSE test is negative. If the test is positive, the carcase and all parts of the body must be disposed of as a category 1 animal by-product.

For more information on testing, see '[BSE testing of cattle](#)'.

Disposal of waste material

Animal by-products must be disposed of in accordance with the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013. This is all slaughter waste not destined for human consumption or classed as SRM, including the horns, hides, hooves and blood. (See also '[Fallen stock and the disposal of animal by-products](#)'.)

The spinal column must not be split. It must be removed whole and disposed of as SRM.

The carcase or any product of animal origin must not be offered for sale or otherwise to a third party or the public, which includes giving away to friends, relatives, etc. If the carcase is to be sold, given away, etc the rules for slaughter on-farm do not apply; a licensed slaughterhouse must always be used and a valid passport is always required.

The beast must be free of veterinary medicine residues.

Specified risk material

The owner must stain, store, dispose of, etc the specified risk material (SRM) in accordance with the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2018.

Definitions of SRM will depend on the age of the animal being slaughtered:

- **cattle of all ages.** The tonsils, the last four metres of small intestine, the caecum and the mesentery
- **cattle over 12 months of age.** The skull (including the brain and eyes but excluding the mandible) and spinal cord
- **cattle over 30 months of age.** The vertebral column (including the dorsal root ganglia but excluding the vertebrae of the tail, the spinous and transverse processes of the cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, the median sacral crest and the wings of the sacrum)

Further information

For more detail on home slaughter of livestock generally, please see '[Home slaughter for private consumption](#)'.

Further [guidance on home slaughter](#) can be found on the Food Standards Agency website.

Trading standards

For more information on the work of trading standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see '[Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties](#)'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: November 2022

Key legislation

[Food Safety Act 1990](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin](#)

[Animal Welfare Act 2006](#)

[Cattle Identification Regulations 2007](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1069/2009 laying down health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption \(Animal by-products Regulation\)](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing](#)

[Animal By-Products \(Enforcement\) \(England\) Regulations 2013](#)

[Food Safety and Hygiene \(England\) Regulations 2013](#)

[Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)

[Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies \(England\) Regulations 2018](#)

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links often only shows the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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