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By email: sidkeaton@gmail.com

Date: 16 August 2023

Dear Sid

Our Ref: FOI 3103

I write in response to your correspondence to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) which was received on 20 July 2023.

As part of this, you requested information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

The information you have requested is as follows:

“For the years 2017 until 2023 inclusive, the number of pigs each year in England and Wales, observed at slaughter with their tails docked.”

Our Response

In accordance with your rights under Section 1(1) of the FOIA, I can confirm that the FSA does not hold recorded information within the scope of your request.

Pig tail docking is not routinely assessed at ante or post mortem inspection. Instances of tail docking would be recorded by exception where the animal's welfare has been compromised; however we have recorded zero instances where tail docking has compromised welfare.

Between July and September 2020, we conducted a tail docking survey, on behalf of Defra, carried out in a select number of pig producing plants in England. The survey indicated that 855,762 of the animals presented showed signs of tail docking. This equates to 64% of the total presented for slaughter.

Background

The FSA is responsible for approval of all slaughterhouses in England and Wales. The FSA's role focuses on ensuring those businesses are compliant with all specific requirements in hygiene and animal welfare legislation.

These requirements are monitored and enforced by Official Veterinarians of the FSA to ensure that animals are spared avoidable suffering, distress or pain during the slaughter process.

The FSA is responsible for the delivery of official controls in approved meat establishments (slaughterhouses, cutting plants and game handling establishments) subject to veterinary control within England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This work is carried out for the FSA by DAERA in Northern Ireland through a Service Level Agreement.

The FSA monitors and enforces welfare compliance in approved slaughterhouses on behalf of the Defra in England and the Welsh Government in Wales through a Service Level Agreement. The FSA has a zero-tolerance approach to animal welfare breaches and all staff are instructed to take prompt and proportionate enforcement action where breaches are identified. This means that we apply the enforcement hierarchy in a way that allows us to take informal enforcement action where breaches are minor and where we believe that this will be effective in avoiding future non-compliance, and take formal action, such as serving of notices or referring the matter for formal investigation in cases where non-compliance falls into the most severe categories which may have caused pain or suffering or where informal enforcement has not resulted in subsequent compliance by the business operator.

FSA official veterinarians and meat hygiene inspectors, either employed by the FSA, or supplied through an approved contractor, carry out a range of official controls duties, including ante-mortem and post-mortem checks (checks on live animals and carcasses and offal) which include checks on the health and welfare of animals presented for slaughter. These official control duties ensure that food businesses operators have produced meat in accordance with regulatory requirements, with a health mark applied to show that meat is safe to enter the food chain.

Internal Review

If you are not satisfied with our handling of your correspondence, then you may request an internal review.

Please clearly indicate that you wish for a review to be conducted and state the reason(s) for requesting the review.

Please note that it is usual practice to accept a request for an internal review within 40 working days from the date of this response. The FOIA code of practice advises that public authorities are not obliged to accept internal reviews after this date.

Please be aware that the review process will focus upon our handling of your request and whether FSA have complied with the requirements of the FOIA. The internal review process should not be used to raise concerns about the internal processes of other FSA functions.

To request a review please contact information.governance@food.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

Bolanle Ojoye
Information Governance Manager

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