



Introduction

Small abattoirs¹ are essential in the supply chain of high quality, fully traceable British meat. Yet they are being forced to close for reasons beyond their control, despite strong and increasing demand for their services.² A further 7 have closed during the last year. There are now just 62 left in the UK, with less than 50 of these in England. This is increasingly leaving parts of the country lacking the provision of a local abattoir.

According to Defra³, direct payments account for 94% and 91% respectively of the profit of lowland and upland grazing livestock farms in England. Beef and sheep farmers are, therefore, expected to be hit hard by the phasing out of basic payments. Being able to add value through direct sales of meat will become even more important than it is already for the survival of such farms from next year.

However, none of this is possible without a small abattoir within an economically viable distance. Since those who market their meat locally generally need only a small number of animals slaughtered at a time, the economical transport distances for the live animals and meat are much shorter than for large loads of animals going to large slaughterhouses. We are therefore asking members of the House of Lords to consider supporting Lord Trees' amendment to include 'slaughtering' in the list of ancillary services carried out for producers as detailed in section 1, 1, 1 (2b) and (5) of the Agriculture Bill.

Why small abattoirs are closing

Profits in the slaughtering industry have been low for many years, which, combined with the burdens of regulation and bureaucracy, have caused many small plants to close. Waste disposal costs for small abattoirs have risen dramatically, partly due to declining competition in the rendering industry. More recently, the collapse of the hides and skins market has affected all abattoirs, but small abattoirs more so than large ones.

Small abattoirs continue to be faced with increased capital expenditure during a period when there are no capital grants. This has related to CCTV and new electrical stunning equipment which costs up to 10 times more per animal in a small abattoir than a large one, because most small abattoirs slaughter only one or two days a week and butcher meat on the other days. Many of the buildings are old and need continual maintenance. Some abattoirs have been forced to close because they cannot find £5,000 to repair a roof or resurface a floor to meet FSA requirements.

Economic Case

As small abattoirs close, it is not simply the loss of a business, it is the loss of an entire supply chain which hinges on the existence of the small abattoir's services, in addition to the direct loss of knowledge and skill which small abattoir workers hold.

¹ Small abattoirs are defined as those slaughtering no more than 1,000 livestock units a year, equivalent to 1,000 adult cattle.

² Local meat sales have been increasing for several years, but [recent research by Kantar](#) found that local sales of red meat since the lockdown have increased twice as fast as the national average.

³ Defra (2018) [Agriculture Bill: Analysis and Economic Rationales for Government Intervention](#), see Figure 12, p36.





*“The role of abattoir, boner, sausage maker and shop worker all rolled into one is a very rare, highly and diversely skilled individual.”
Antony Coates, abattoir owner in Derby*

A small abattoir serves 100 farms on average, mostly within a 30-mile radius. These farms in turn support a range of employees – on-farm and in local retailers and restaurants that source their meat. For every job there is a further value for the community, as employees live and spend within that community, using local schools, shops and services. Finally, a burgeoning local food sector attracts visitors and further boosts the local economy.

Small abattoirs are a leveller when it comes to accessing good quality, nutritious food. Our research has found that small abattoirs and local meat outlets serve a wide range of customers, from elderly couples and families, to single parents and students. Part of adding value to the meat is the skill with which local butchers and farmers can sell a whole animal – from the more expensive cuts, such as steaks, to the cheaper cuts, such as mince and offal, thereby offering a wide range of products and prices.

While small abattoirs process low volumes compared with larger plants, their produce is high in value – and this will be crucial post-Brexit for some farmers to survive economically.

Mettrick’s Butchers, Glossop

We have just started a farm shop and we contacted Mettrick’s Butchers to prepare our beef for sale. We are farmers, so having a local small butcher to do the work is ideal for us. If we lose our small butchers, we would not be able to carry out this part of the business. I currently make 2.5 times more on the value of each animal than I would make in a livestock market, so losing this income would seriously affect my business. If only large slaughterhouses were available, they would not be interested in me.
Les Boam – Tagg Lane Dairy LTD, Bakewell, Derbyshire.

Peter Greig, Pipers Farm, online retailer

Peter has 5-6 bullocks slaughter locally each week. In April 2020, a 32-month Devon bullock weighing 630kgs live, when processed through an industrial slaughterhouse, had a market value of 330kgs x £3.00/ kg = £990

The same animal when processed through a low throughput abattoir had a value of 360kgs (untrimmed wt.) x £3.65/kg = £1314

If the carcass is then delivered to a local processing unit 3 days after slaughter and hung for 4 weeks, it has a retail value of £2750

Tim Garside, farmer and rare breed burger restaurant, Huddersfield

If Tim took his over 30-month rare breed beast to Dawn Meats (a large abattoir) he would get £2.70/kg, which for a beast at 400kg dead weight comes to £1,080. When he brings a beast to a small abattoir where it is killed and processed into burgers, this costs him £1.20 per burger. He then sells those 160g burgers for between £8 and £10 each as part of a restaurant meal. He has the costs of the animal and rearing, plus his restaurant overheads, but if 50% of the dead weight (or 200kg) of the meat, plus water and seasonings, is used, this will make 1250 burgers.

Say the value of his animal is £1080 (taking no account of any profit selling the animal to Dawn) and the cost to make it into burgers is £1500, then the total cost is £2580. But total income from the burgers is £10K (less overheads) so he is going to make a significantly better return than if he sold the animal to Dawn meats.

William Lloyd Williams, small abattoir, Wales

If he had taken a small Welsh mountain lamb to market he would have got £35-£40, compared with putting the same lamb through a small abattoir, resulting in a box scheme price of £100.

