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**Why small abattoirs?**

Smaller abattoirs underpin regenerative agriculture, providing the crucial services that enable farmers to produce, slaughter and process livestock locally, adding value to meat and selling direct to customers through a wide range of outlets. The small abattoir sector is key to delivering environment goals, supporting local procurement, maintaining food security, enhancing animal welfare and benefitting rural economies.

**What are the problems?**

Small abattoirs have been closing at a rate of 10% per year, leaving many areas lacking adequate provision of the right services. for closures are complex but often due to a combination of running costs, regulatory and administrative pressures, staff shortage and retirement without succession.

**About the ASG**

The Abattoir Sector Group (ASG) was set up in 2020 to provide a unified voice for the small and local abattoir sector. Steering Group members include organisations such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, the Association of Independent Meat Suppliers, National Craft Butchers, Pasture for Life, Rare Breeds Survival Trust, and the Sustainable Food Trust.

**What the ASG does**

Over the past four years, the ASG has lobbied for small abattoirs to be supported through funding, for regulation to be risk based and proportionate, and for key issues such as labour shortage and waste costs to be addressed. Through meetings with Ministers, the CEO and Chair of the Food Standards Agency and other senior officials, ASG representatives have consistently ensured small abattoirs are recognised and prioritised as strategic assets. The ASG supported the creation of Defra’s Small Abattoir Task and Finish Group, acting as co-chair and co-secretariat. This group works with the sector to identify and address areas of concern. The ASG is also a stakeholder within engagement processes on Official Veterinary (OV) provision and programmes to reduce administrative burden.

**What has been achieved**

**Smaller Abattoir Fund (SAF)** – This £4m fund was co-created with industry and launched in December 2023 for existing smaller abattoirs in England. The grant intervention rate was raised from 40% to 50% following feedback provided by the ASG. The fund offers grants of between £2k and £75k for capital items that improve productivity, enhance animal health and welfare, add value to primary products or encourage investment in innovation and new technology.

**New abattoir funding** – Announced by the Prime Minister in May, £3m will be made available through the Farming Investment Fund for the creation of new abattoirs in England. The ASG will be supporting the launch and roll-out of the funding and would like to hear from anyone interested in applying.

**Regulatory easements** – The ASG has lobbied for the implementation of the Livestock Unit Regulatory Flexibility, known as the ‘5% Rule’, which would allow smaller abattoirs with a combined throughput of up to 5% of Great Britain’s total throughput to benefit from flexible attendance for post-mortem inspections, thereby reducing the amount of time a vet must be present. Ministers have expressed support for this and Defra are working towards implementing this rule with EU approval.

**Over-Thirty Month (OTM) Rule** – The ASG has lobbied for a relaxation of the OTM rule, which creates extra work and cost for small abattoirs, many of whom opt not to process OTM cattle. Only 40 small abattoirs in England currently offer private kill services to all OTM cattle. The government is submitting an application for negligible BSE risk status and once this status has been achieved, TSE rules, including OTM, can be reviewed. This is significant progress and a major piece of work for Defra, involving the devolved nations and European bodies.

**Reduced administration** – ASG representatives supported the FSA’s work to reduce the amount of daily administration for small abattoirs. The FSA have now introduced an exception reporting daily diary as part of the guidance that small abattoirs receive.

**Official Veterinary (OV) Provision** – ASG has shared feedback with the FSA as stakeholders on their engagement process for the re-tender of OVs, including that the re-tender process should allow for local veterinary businesses to tender for the work, should they wish to.

**Next Steps**

**Funding** – The ASG will work closely with Defra on the launch of the new abattoir fund and will be providing support where appropriate for those seeking to set up a new abattoir. Promoting the existing Smaller Abattoir Fund will also continue to be a priority. Please contact us for more information.

**Regulation** – The ASG will continue to push for risk based and proportionate regulation and believes the role of the OV must be reviewed in light of veterinary shortage and problems with inexperienced OVs. The ASG will also explore solutions such as remote inspection technology.

**Skilled labour** – Government have recognised the challenges with recruitment of skilled labour and held a roundtable in May to seek feedback from industry, including ASG members. The shortage of skilled labour is a major barrier for the creation of new abattoirs, and a collaborative approach will be needed across the sector and government departments to address it.

**Animal By-Products** – ASG has identified the costs of waste disposal and the collapse in value of hides and skins as a key issue and will be working through the Defra Task and Finish Group to find solutions, including the potential for a ‘hub and spoke’ model of by-product collection and utilisation. Supporting the development of markets and infrastructure for small-scale hide and skin processing in the UK will also be explored.

**Devolved Nations** – We will be developing our strategy for the devolved nations and seeking feedback from the sector about how we can support them.

**Contact the ASG**

If you would like more information, want to be kept up to date or are interested in joining as a member, please contact – [megan@sustainablefoodtrust.org](mailto:megan@sustainablefoodtrust.org) [www.abattoirsectorgroup.org](http://www.abattoirsectorgroup.org)