

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE: POTENTIAL MERITS OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR SMALL ABATTOIRS

Westminster Hall

Sarah Dyke MP (Glastonbury and Somerton)

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- **Primary food production is largely a rural business and with food being the UK's largest manufacturing sector, it is of vital importance both to the national and local economies. Investing in opportunities for local food production, and robust local markets, must surely be a key objective for government.**
- **We welcomed the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024 which banned the export of live animals for slaughter outside the British Islands. Perhaps more important to welfare, however, is that slaughter takes place as close as possible to where an animal is reared. This should be a key consideration in any local food infrastructure.**
- **There is apparent cross-party recognition of the value of local slaughter, but we were disappointed by the omission of issue of local abattoirs from the previous government's Food Strategy. With the current government developing a new Food Strategy we hope it will address this issue.**
- **Given technological advances, the government may wish to consider whether a lighter-touch regulatory framework for abattoirs with lower compliance costs may better serve the cause of animal welfare overall.**
- **Local slaughter allows for added product value to be retained within local economies aside from the important benefits it offers for animal welfare. It should also be part of long overdue reform of food labelling, as it is an important consideration in driving consumer choice.**

Previous government policies

- The last government published a Food Strategy in June 2022¹, but the document made no reference to abattoirs or slaughter. In opposition, the Labour Party raised concerns about this omission.
- In a House of Lords debate on pig farming in June 2022, Baroness Hayman of Ullock, as Shadow Defra Spokesperson, said, *"We believe the abattoir network is just as much in need of support as farmers. It needs short-term capital investment to get itself match fit for a new, more market-facing world, in which consumers expect high welfare and environmental standards."*²

¹ Defra, [Government food strategy](#), 12.06.22

² HL Deb, 16.06.22, [c1767](#)

- She continued, *“The Government maintain that there is sufficient capacity in the system but it is not just about capacity. It is also about transport costs, animal welfare issues and how small producers can access the services they need.”*³
- Responding on behalf of the then-government the Defra Minister, Lord Benyon, highlighted mobile abattoirs as a possible part of the solution: *“Yesterday, I was at Fir Farm in Gloucestershire, looking at a mobile slaughterhouse. This is an innovation that I hope the Food Standards Agency will authorise in the near future. This will be of enormous benefit to stock farmers, and it will alleviate the movements that some stock has to make.”*⁴
- Subsequently in December 2023, the government launched a £4 million Smaller Abattoir Fund, making available capital grants from £2,000 to a maximum of £60,000 to help support smaller abattoirs across England improve productivity, enhance animal health and welfare, add value to primary products, and encourage innovation and investment in new technologies.⁴
- The government also supported what became the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024, which banned the export of live animals for slaughter outside the British Islands.

Current government policy

- In March 2025 the current government announced that it had recruited a team of food sector experts to serve as the Food Strategy Advisory Board to advise on the creation of a new cross-government food strategy.⁵
- In February 2025 the Food Security Minister, Daniel Zeichner MP, said: *“The Government firmly believes that food security is national security and is committed to maintaining a resilient food supply chain. Defra recognises the vital contribution a thriving abattoir network plays in achieving this goal. We remain committed to working with abattoirs of all sizes across the UK’s meat processing sector in tackling the challenges and opportunities they face.”*⁶
- The Smaller Abattoir Fund closed on 30 September 2024, with the government saying that Defra would in future simplify and rationalise grant funding, aiming to ensure that grants deliver the most benefit for food security and nature, with any new grant fund rounds to be confirmed in time.⁷

Countryside Alliance position

- Given the widespread recognition of the value of local slaughter, not least for animal welfare, we were disappointed by the omission of abattoirs from the previous government’s Food Strategy. With the current government developing a new Food Strategy we hope it will address this issue.
- We welcomed the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024. Perhaps more important to welfare, however, is that slaughter takes place as close as possible to where an animal is reared. This should be a key consideration in any local food infrastructure.

³ HL Deb, 16.06.22, [c1772](#)

⁴ Defra, [Applications open for new £4 million fund to support smaller abattoirs](#), 13.12.23

⁵ Defra, [Leading food experts join Government food strategy to restore pride in British food](#), 21.03.25

⁶ HC Deb, 17.02.25, [cW](#)

⁷ HC Deb, 20.01.15, [cW](#)

- The Countryside Alliance supports calls for the development of a network of local abattoirs, or alternative solutions such as mobile abattoirs. Aside from the important benefit to animal welfare, local slaughter also allows for added product value to be retained within local economies.
- The costs involved in running an abattoir increased considerably as a result of various EU directives dating back to 2009, with the result that large numbers of smaller abattoirs across the country became financially unviable and closed. Since the UK's exit from the EU these regulations have been largely maintained, with some adaptations to address the new legal landscape.
- Given technological advances such as the requirement for CCTV to be installed and used in abattoirs that was implemented in 2018, the government may wish to consider whether a lighter-touch regulatory framework with lower compliance costs may better serve the cause of animal welfare overall. A less burdensome framework could lower barriers to the operation of more local abattoirs and cut the overall distance travelled by animals from farm to slaughter.
- Local slaughter would also assist in the promotion of local food consumption, since it would situate more of the production journey within an identifiable area and avoid unnecessary transportation elsewhere.
- A proper network of abattoirs would represent a major improvement in the existing local food infrastructure.
- Local slaughter should also be part of long overdue reform of food labelling as it is an important consideration in driving consumer choice and increasing product value.

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