

## **CLEAN LIVESTOCK – SHEEP**

### **Introduction**

An effective Clean Livestock Policy is very important not just in terms of basic food safety but also as a reputational issue for Ireland's meat industry and to safeguard our ongoing major export trade in meat and hides. This policy is underpinned by EU and national regulatory requirements.

DAFM has operated a formal Clean Livestock Policy (CLP), focusing on bovines going to slaughter, since 1998. The Department has also identified a need to develop an equivalent policy for sheep going to slaughter, based on recent evaluation by DAFM of sheep carcass hygiene in slaughter plants.

It is clear that there is a need to significantly improve performance in relation to the cleanliness of incoming sheep, to ensure the continuation and expansion of this trade. Sending dirty sheep to slaughter increases the contamination risk from harmful bacteria. Dirty sheep risk our valuable sheep and fleece markets. It is intended that the sheep CLP will be broadly similar to the bovine equivalent.

### **Sheep CLP categories**

The Department will verify a 3-category system, requiring food business operators at slaughtering establishments to categorise sheep as follows:

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| Category (A) | Satisfactory – Sheep that can be slaughtered, without an unacceptable risk of contaminating the meat during the slaughter process, by using the standard hygienic dressing procedures routinely employed by the plant.                           |
| Category (B) | Acceptable – Sheep that can only be slaughtered, without an unacceptable risk of contamination of the meat during the slaughter process, by putting in place additional interventions including extra defined dressing controls.                 |
| Category (C) | Unacceptable – Sheep unfit for slaughter because of fleece condition. These sheep must not be presented for ante-mortem in this condition and it is the responsibility of the Food Business Operator (FBO) to take the required remedial action. |

### **Advice/Recommendations**

The following are a number of steps/interventions which need to be taken by stakeholders along the supply chain to minimise the potential for carcass contamination during sheep slaughter.

### **Farmer/Keeper**

1. Dock lamb tails before 7 days of age, if necessary, taking account of husbandry practices and market outlets.
2. Crutch/dag dirty sheep prior to transport to slaughter plant.
3. House on straw bedding or clean slats and withdraw feed from sheep for minimum 8 hours pre slaughter. Water should be available to animals at all times.

4. Whether using your own or contracted transportation you should only use clean, dry, well ventilated transport vehicles. The transport vehicle should have a waterproof roof, where possible, taking account of journey times and weather conditions. You should also ensure you use absorbent materials on the floor of the transport vehicles.
5. Producers are food business operators and should only send clean sheep to the slaughter plant.

### **Haulier**

1. Hauliers have a major role to play and must ensure the transport vehicle is clean and dry prior to loading.
2. Only use well ventilated transport vehicles. The transport vehicle should have a waterproof roof, where possible, taking account of journey times and weather conditions.
3. Where tiered transport vehicles are used the haulier should ensure that faeces/urine from sheep on higher tiers/levels do not soil sheep on lower tiers/levels.
4. Use absorbent materials on the floor of transport vehicles during transport.
5. Only load clean sheep.
6. Follow-up engagement and actions will be taken where it is clearly evident that soiling is attributable to repeated failure on the part of a haulier.

### **Processor**

1. Provide standard photographic examples of all 3 categories (A, B & C) at the entrance to the lairage of the slaughter plant.
2. Categorise and record the number of sheep accepted into the slaughter plant into the A/B/C categories listed.
3. In the case of category A animals no intervention is required other than the application of standard hygienic dressing procedures.
4. In the case of Category B animals the FBO must ensure an intervention takes place e.g. removal of wool from either side of all cut lines in a well ventilated area immediately after bleeding and prior to entry into the dressing area. The width of the sheared surface must be greater than the wool length. Air movement in the clipping area must be in the opposite direction to that of the slaughter line.  
Additional/alternative interventions can also be considered providing they ensure an equivalent outcome.
5. In the case of Category C animals the FBO must take all required steps ranging from drying out the fleece to completely shearing some animals prior to presentation of the animals for ante mortem examination. The FBO must also have a Standard Operating Procedure in place and agreed with DAFM setting out the procedures to address these requirements. For an interim period (until 1st June 2017) as a minimum intervention such animals must be kept to the end of the day for processing.
6. Modify dressing techniques and line speed, where necessary, to minimise carcass contamination.
7. Take all necessary steps to ensure only clean carcasses are presented for post mortem inspection.
8. To ensure a process of continuous improvement, over time, the processor should provide feedback to herdowners/keepers on the condition of their animals presented for slaughter e.g. - by giving the number of animals by CLP category; by providing photographic evidence, where necessary, of the condition of the animals.
9. Provide adequate washing facilities for transport vehicles which must include a means of capturing/storing transport bedding.

### **Department role**

DAFM's role in this area includes coordination of the following:

- The ongoing Clean Livestock Policy awareness campaign - including dissemination of information through stakeholders, updating advice leaflets, channelling information on CLP to farmers via Teagasc/discussion groups and ongoing issue of mailshots to repeat offenders;
- Review ongoing measures by stakeholders designed to reduce production and intake of Category C animals at slaughter plants;
- Review risk assessment for on-farm inspections, in particular for both the hygiene and recording provisions that relate to the production of clean livestock;
- Encouraging processing industry to consider measures designed to reduce intake of Category Cs;
- Consideration of application of compliance actions, with a view to avoiding recurrence of ongoing significant CLP non-conformance. Options available range from warning letters to inspections and as a last resort sanctions allowed under national and EU legislation.

**The implementation of policy in this area will require the ongoing collaboration of all stakeholders to ensure sustained progress.**