

## **Explanatory note**

The current version of the RSPCA welfare standards for pigs that RSPCA Assured members are required to implement is dated November 2016, with addendums published in March 2021 and April 2022. As part of the on-going process of reviewing the welfare standards, they have now been amended and updated, which includes the addition of a number of new standards and guidance (information boxes).

The review process, which is undertaken in consultation with the farming industry, veterinary profession and welfare research sector, is necessary to ensure that the standards take proper account of the latest scientific research, veterinary knowledge and practical developments, and therefore continue to represent 'good practice' in farm animal care.

**These changes will be incorporated into a revised edition of the RSPCA welfare standards for pigs, to be issued in March 2025.**

All the amendments made to the November 2016 version of the standards and addendums, are listed below and have been marked with **NEW** or **REVISED**.

**RSPCA Assured scheme members have three months from the date of this letter to fully implement these changes (i.e. by March 2025) unless otherwise stated by the standard.**

### **Please note:**

All standards in the November 2016 edition and addendums that are not shown below or are shown but do not have a **NEW** or **REVISED** next to them remain unchanged in the new edition. Due to the amendment process, some existing standards have been re-ordered and therefore re-numbered.

RSPCA Farm Animals Department

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024

# Food and water

## Food

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**FW 1.6.1** **NEW** Producers must speak to their fieldsperson, veterinary surgeon or nutritionist if experiencing problems with poor sow condition.

### Below FW 1.11



**REVISED** A feed place is described as the lateral head space required by a single pig whilst eating.

**FW 1.11.1** **REVISED** Feed places must have a minimum width of:

- a) 15cm for pigs weighing up to 35kg
- b) 20cm for pigs weighing 35kg and up to 50kg
- c) 30cm for pigs weighing 50kg and above.

**FW 1.11.2** **NEW** Where feeders have been installed prior to December 2020, a minimum feeder width of 25cm is permitted for pigs weighing 50kg and above, provided that additional feed places are provided at the ratio specified in standard FW 1.11.



**NEW** The RSPCA will continue to review the minimum feeder space requirement set out in standard FW 1.11.2 and will be requiring all producers to meet the requirements of standard FW 1.11.1 c) in the future. As such, producers are strongly encouraged to install feeders that are compliant with standard FW 1.11.1 c) at the earliest opportunity.

### Below FW 1.15



**REVISED** The earlier the weaning age of the piglets, the greater the chance of them suffering from welfare problems; therefore, a more careful system is required with respect to management and nutrition of the piglets.

**FW 1.15.1** **NEW** The use of equipment that is designed to rear surplus piglets, such as rescue decks, is prohibited except in emergency situations to protect the welfare of sick piglets.

## Water

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### Below FW 2.5



**NEW** For drinkers pointing straight out from the wall this would be around pig shoulder height. If drinkers are pointed downward then the appropriate angle is 5cm above the back of the pig or 20% higher than shoulder height, so that pigs lift their heads slightly to drink.

# Environment

## Buildings

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- E 2.1** **NEW** Buildings must be designed and erected to be suitable for local weather conditions and be able to withstand expected seasonal extremes of weather.
- E 2.1.1** **NEW** The apron immediately surrounding the outside of the house must:
- a) be kept clean and tidy
  - b) not offer shelter to wild birds or rodents
  - c) be well-managed, with any vegetation kept short.
- E 2.1.2** **NEW** All buildings, equipment (including livestock fencing) and facilities that pigs may come into contact with must be:
- a) fit for purpose
  - b) well maintained.

## Space allowances

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### Below E 5.1



**REVISED** The RSPCA is reviewing the minimum space requirements set out under standard E 5.1 and will be requiring more space for pigs in these systems in the next version of the standards.

**Any producers that are looking to install such systems are strongly encouraged to contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department at the earliest opportunity.**

- E 5.3** **NEW** From 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026, pigs must be split sexed by the time they reach an average live weight of 50kg.



**REVISED** The RSPCA has concerns about the welfare implications of raising heavier boars. Split sex groups may help to ameliorate some of these concerns.

**E 5.3.1** **NEW** In relation to standard E 5.2, where it is not possible to evenly split sex all the pigs whilst still meeting the space allowance requirements of these standards, then up to 5% of the herd can be put into mixed sex pens.



**NEW** For example, on a unit with 200 pigs, up to 10 pigs could be kept in a mixed sex pen.

We acknowledge that the sex ratio is rarely 50:50 and therefore the need for a 5% tolerance limit to allow the mixing of pigs under such circumstances.

**E 5.3.2** **NEW** Any 'smalls' (smaller pigs that are less robust and need separating from other pigs in the main herd) can be put into mixed sex pens, but these must not make up more than 10% of the herd.



**NEW** The hospital pen can contain both sexes at the same time.

## Farrowing systems

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Below E 6.1



**REVISED** The RSPCA is aware of instances where sows are moved into different types of farrowing accommodation (e.g. loose indoor system/outdoor system to a crate system and vice versa) on a litter by litter basis, such as when converting to a new housing system using a step-wise approach. However, the RSPCA is concerned about this practice due to the negative impact on the welfare of the sow. Producers looking to convert away from farrowing crates to a loose farrowing system using this step-wise approach are strongly advised to contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department ([farm-animals@rspca.org.uk](mailto:farm-animals@rspca.org.uk)).

Please note, for clarification, piglets from sows kept in crate systems are not approved by the assurance scheme assessing against these standards, as these standards do not permit the use of any system that confines the sow for farrowing or lactation (see standards E 6.6 & E 7.8).

## Indoor farrowing

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**NEW** The RSPCA is reviewing the following standards on indoor farrowing. Any producers that are looking to install such systems are therefore strongly encouraged to contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department at the earliest opportunity.

## Outdoor and free-range production

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**E 10.5.1** **NEW** Where bedding is burnt, there must be no pigs present in the immediate vicinity.

# Management

## Managers

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M 2.4

**REVISED** Managers must:

- a) develop and implement contingency plans and preventative measures for the following emergency situations, to help ensure the welfare of the animals can be safeguarded:
  - i. fire
  - ii. flood
  - iii. interruption of supplies to the farm, e.g. feed
  - iv. notifiable disease outbreaks
  - v. mass on-farm culling, e.g. due to an outbreak of a notifiable disease
  - vi. periods where the animals are required to remain on the farm for longer than planned, e.g. where there is a significant delay in animals being taken to the slaughterhouse
- b) provide an emergency action board sited in a prominent position that is visible to all farm staff and emergency services, which must include:
  - i. the procedures to be followed by those discovering an emergency
  - ii. the location of water sources for use by the fire services
  - iii. the What3words address and postcode for location of the unit.



**NEW** A contingency plan assists those on farm to be prepared for the precautions and actions that may need to be taken in the event of a notifiable disease outbreak. Contingency plans will demonstrate due consideration is given to the potential welfare issues that could arise should there be a notifiable disease outbreak. This would include:

- the effect of movement restrictions and the potential implications
- meeting the welfare needs of slaughter pigs that can't be moved.

M 2.4.1

**NEW** Plans and policies relating to standard M 2.4 a) iv) and v) must be:

- a) approved by a veterinary surgeon
- b) practically implemented on the farm
- c) adhered to by all staff

## Identification

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M 5.2

**REVISED** Justification for slapmarking for farm trial purposes or similar must be provided to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department in writing for review.

## Artificial Intelligence

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**NEW** The RSPCA is reviewing the role of artificial intelligence and the wide-ranging benefits it can bring to pig welfare, particularly in the area of health and welfare monitoring.

It is strongly recommended that producers investigate the feasibility of such technology to further safeguard animal welfare.

Where such technology is being considered, please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

# Health

**H 1.6** **REVISED** The following health and welfare conditions, where applicable to the unit, must be listed in the VHWP (see standard H 1.4 a)):

- a) pre-weaning mortality levels
- b) post weaning mortality
- c) pigs humanely killed as unfit
- d) body condition of sows
- e) incidence of tail biting on the unit
- f) incidence and type of lameness
- g) injuries
- h) the main disease problems affecting or likely to affect the farm
- i) all deaths and culls that occur within 48 hours of pigs arriving onto the unit, including the reason (where known).



**REVISED** In addition to reviewing the environment, management and veterinary care of pigs when health and welfare problems arise, consideration should be given as to whether genetics may be a contributory factor, and hence whether changes in the unit's/company's policy on genetics in the herd would be beneficial.

For example, with regards to litter size, breeding goals resulting in litter sizes that consistently exceed the sows' number of functional teats are hindering progress in improving health and welfare. The 2022 European Food Safety Authority report on the welfare of pigs recommends that selection for litter size should be limited to an average number of 12–14 piglets born alive.

Producers are strongly encouraged to provide feedback on this issue to breeding companies and think critically about the unit's/company's future policy on breeding and genetics.

The RSPCA believes that welfare should be enhanced, not compromised, and prioritised in breeding/genetic programmes. The Farm Animals Department will continue to monitor developments on this subject, which will be a key focus area for the RSPCA standards going forward.

**H 1.6.1** **NEW** With regards to the following conditions, producers must follow the latest version of the Pig Veterinary Society's document *The Casualty Pig*, with respect to humane end-points:

- a) body condition
- b) tail biting
- c) lameness
- d) injuries.



**NEW** A humane endpoint is an agreed point at which an animal is humanely euthanised due to, for example, unmanageable pain, because it is not responding to treatment, or because future treatments are unlikely to be effective.

**H 1.10** **REVISED** The following documentation for the herd is required:

- a) an infectious disease and vaccination plan with details of any vaccines required to be used, target animals and boosters required
- b) a parasite control plan that specifies strategies and worming programmes, including target animals and medicines to be used
- c) a biosecurity and infectious disease control policy for controlling the spread of infectious disease between stock, which must include disease investigation and surveillance, incoming stock and isolation of stock with infectious disease
- d) procedures for the management of casualty animals including responsibilities and methods for humane emergency slaughter
- e) an effective procedure for identifying animals that are undergoing/have undergone treatment, which is known to all farm staff
- f) procedures for the safe disposal of pharmaceutical waste, needles and other sharps, in accordance with the relevant waste disposal regulations
- g) a written hygiene policy.

## Casualty animals

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**H 2.1.1** **NEW** With regards to H 2.1, there must be someone on site who is trained and competent to carry out euthanasia within 60 minutes, at the latest, of a pig being identified as requiring euthanasia.

**H 2.1.2** **NEW** An emergency procedures action plan must be detailed in the Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (see standard H 1.1) to address situations where mass culling may be required, for example in response to a major disease outbreak.



**NEW** Where mass culling is required, for example in response to a major disease outbreak, prompt identification and action can prevent considerable suffering. Producers need to outline measures to ensure this is achieved as part of an Emergency Procedures Action Plan. It is particularly important that due attention is paid to welfare in such circumstances as advised by the attending veterinary surgeon.

Below H 2.6



**NEW** It is recommended that a different mark be used to identify dead pigs than that used to identify pigs being treated or selected for slaughter.

**H 2.6.1** **NEW** All fallen stock must be marked with indelible dye (i.e. a dye that cannot be removed) prior to being placed into fallen stock storage (see standard H 2.7).



- H 2.7** **REVISED** All carcasses must be:
- a) stored in suitable containers:
    - i. with no parts of the carcass visible,
    - ii. that are locked when the site is not attended and always at the end of each working day
  - b) disposed of strictly according to current legislation.

## Medicines

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- H 4.7** **REVISED** **LEGAL** On-farm medicine use (including vaccines) must be listed, stating:
- a) dose rates
  - b) timing of vaccination
  - c) frequency of use
  - d) the reason for use
  - e) animal(s) treated.
- H 4.7.1** **NEW** **LEGAL** Records of medicine use must be kept for five years.
- H 4.7.2** **REVISED** Total antibiotics used must be collated and uploaded onto AHDB Pork's electronic medicine book <https://emb-pigs.ahdb.org.uk/>

## Antibiotic usage

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**REVISED** Prevention is better than cure, and it is the implementation of prevention strategies alongside the adoption of farming practices that prioritise and promote animal welfare that are key to reducing antibiotic use.

For more information on this issue, please see our information sheet available on our website [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk).

- H(A) 1.1** **NEW** Antibiotics must only be used when necessary, and always used responsibly.
- H(A) 1.1.1** **NEW** The prophylactic use of antibiotics is not permitted.



**NEW** Prophylactic treatment is intended to prevent sickness or disease developing in a group of healthy animals where a veterinary surgeon has identified that there could be a high risk of bacterial infection. We believe that there should be no need for the prophylactic use of antibiotics when following these standards. However, we acknowledge there may be very exceptional circumstances, e.g. in the case of an emergency, such as a transport accident, where a veterinary surgeon may feel it is in the best interests of the affected animal's welfare for antibiotics to be given preventatively. We would expect these occasions to be extremely rare and limited to only a few animals.

Metaphylactic treatment is intended to control disease spreading in groups of animals where some are already showing clinical signs of disease and is not covered by standard H(A) 1.1.1.

- H(A) 1.2** **NEW** The use of antibiotics on-farm must be reviewed annually and this review must form part of the VHWP.
- H(A) 1.3** **NEW** In light of the findings of the antibiotic use review (see standard H(A) 1.2), an action plan must be drawn up aimed at reducing the use of antibiotics on the farm through improvements in animal husbandry.
- H(A) 1.4** **NEW** When reviewing the use of antibiotics on-farm, the following must be included in the plan (see standard H(A) 1.3):
- the different classes of antibiotic drug used
  - which group/s\* of animals were treated, and for which condition/s
  - the number of animals treated per occasion,
  - the total amount of each individual drug within a class that was used (in mg/kg or mg/pcu) per occasion
  - a specific section covering all the above for 'Critically Important Antibiotics' (CIAs).
- \*A group of animals refers to animals of a similar age and/or stage of production.



**REVISED** This review is intended to highlight which groups of animals are suffering from particular diseases and therefore aid the development and implementation of targeted prevention strategies.

## Mutilations

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Below H 7.1



**NEW** The 3Rs approach – Reduction, Replacement and Refinement – is applied with the aim of preventing painful procedures being carried out on animals. The 3Rs should be the centre of discussions with your farm vet and potential finishing units, where appropriate, regarding the need to tail dock, teeth clip/grind and nose ring pigs.

Examples of each include:

**Reduction:** only teeth clipping/grinding gilt litters or large litters.

**Replacement:** replacing tail docking with increased herd inspection, reduced stocking densities and increased environmental enrichment provision.

**Refinement:** implementing more staff training on how to carry out these procedures.



**NEW** The RSPCA is working to phase out the practices of tail docking, teeth reduction and nose ringing. However, it is acknowledged that prohibiting these procedures at this time could lead to detrimental impacts on animal welfare, such as an increased number of tail bitten pigs, an increase in injuries to piglets and sow teats, and an increase in piglet chilling and potentially higher pre-weaning mortality levels. This is an area under constant review and we encourage producers to think critically about these procedures.



**NEW** The RSPCA is currently investigating the possibility of providing both short-acting and long-acting pain relief for tail docking and nose ringing, as an interim measure, where permission to carry out these procedures is granted.

#### H 7.4

**REVISED** With regards to tail docking:

- a) **LEGAL** tail docking is not permitted except in exceptional circumstances
- b) requests for permission to tail dock must be submitted to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department by the producer in conjunction with the unit's veterinary surgeon, including:
  - i. the reasons for the request being made
  - ii. an indication of the severity (numbers involved, frequency of outbreaks) of tail biting on the unit in the last year
  - iii. the proposed method of docking (including equipment to be used)
  - iv. information on the other actions taken to alleviate the problem through means other than docking, including the date the action was taken in the last year.
  - v. an indication of the amount of tail to be left intact and the reasons for this (see standard H 7.7)
  - vi. the name and address of the farm requiring permission and the relevant farm assurance membership number.

#### H 7.15

**REVISED** With regards to the use of Improvac® on male pigs:

- a) requests for permission to use Improvac® must be submitted to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department by the producer in conjunction with the unit's veterinary surgeon, including welfare-related reasons for the request
- b) the Department's written response must be made available on request.

# Transport

**T 1.1.1** **NEW** From 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026, all cull sows and boars must be:

- a) transported according to the transport standards (see standards T 1.1 – T 7.3)
- b) transported by a haulier that has been approved by the certification scheme assessing against these standards as being compliant with the *RSPCA welfare standards for pigs*.

**T 1.1.2** **NEW** With regards to the transport of cull sows and boars:

- a) journey times exceeding 8 hours are not permitted, except in exceptional circumstances
- b) where it is not possible to transport cull sows or boars within the maximum permitted journey time of 8 hours (see standard T 5.7), producers and/or hauliers must receive annual written permission from the RSPCA Farm Animals Department to exceed the 8 hour journey time limit.



**NEW** When requesting permission to exceed the 8 hour journey time, the following details should be included:

- location of the breeding unit(s)
- location of the slaughterhouse(s)
- number of journeys each year likely to exceed 8 hours
- proposed route, including expected journey time
- rationale for needing to exceed 8 hours
- how the health and welfare of the animals will not be negatively impacted by the additional journey time.

# Slaughter/killing

- S 1.1.1** **NEW** From 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026, all cull sows and boars must be slaughtered/killed:
- according to standards S 1.1 – S 10.25
  - in a slaughterhouse that has been approved by the certification scheme assessing against these standards as being compliant with the *RSPCA welfare standards for pigs*.

## Management and training

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- S 2.4** **REVISED** Managers, in conjunction with the AWO, must:
- develop and implement a training programme for all staff involved in the handling and slaughtering/killing of pigs
  - ensure that these staff are trained and competent to carry out their duties
  - ensure that the following operations are only carried out by persons holding a certificate of competence for such operations:
    - handling and care of animals in the lairage
    - restraint of animals during stunning or killing
    - stunning of animals
    - assessment of effectiveness of stunning
    - shackling or hoisting of live animals
    - bleeding of live animals.
  - only record staff training as completed once a self declaration of competence has been signed by both the trainee and management staff.



**NEW** For staff undertaking the operations listed under standard S 2.4 c), a certificate of competence in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009<sup>1</sup> is required.

<sup>1</sup>Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, Article 7, Paragraph 2.

## Lairage

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- S 4.4.2** **NEW** Pigs lairaged at slaughterhouses overnight must be provided with suitable bedding to ensure their physical and thermal comfort.



**NEW** Suitable bedding includes straw and rubber mats. To ensure the physical comfort of the pigs, the material used is required to keep the pigs dry and clean (i.e. no pooling of water and/or urine/faeces), and be deep enough so that the temperature of the surface/material in contact with the pigs is higher than that felt directly on the floor.

- S 4.8** **NEW** The use of off-site lairaging facilities must not be used as an extension of the on-site lairage.



**NEW** Off-site lairages may only be used in emergency situations.

- S 4.9** **NEW** Should the use of an off-site lairage be required, the scheme that is responsible for assessing against these standards must be notified within 24 hours of pigs being unloaded at the lairage.

## Slaughter equipment

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Below S 6.2



**REVISED** Regular decarbonising and cleaning of electrodes (when dry) with a wire brush can improve the efficiency of current flow of electrical stunning equipment, leading to a more effective stun.

## Slaughter/killing methods

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- S 7.1** **REVISED** Pigs must only be slaughtered/killed using one of the following methods:

- a) electrical stun-to-kill (electrocution)
  - i. one-cycle method (head-to-back)
  - ii. two-cycle method
- b) free bullet
- c) penetrative captive bolt
- d) electronarcosis
- e) exposure to carbon dioxide until death ensues
- f) carbon dioxide associated with inert gases
- g) inert gases.



**NEW** The methods listed in S 7.1, with the exception of free bullet, must legally be followed as quickly as possible by a procedure ensuring death such as bleeding, pithing, electrocution or prolonged exposure to anoxia.



**NEW** Methods by which electrical stun-to-kill (electrocution) is permitted under S7.1 a):

- i. **one-cycle method (head-to-back):** this method involves passing a current simultaneously through the brain and the heart.
- ii. **two-cycle method:** this method involves a current being first applied to the head, using hand-held tongs (similar to head-only stunning), immediately followed by the application of current across the chest to induce cardiac ventricular fibrillation.

**S 7.1.1** **NEW** The use of restrainer conveyor systems, such as the 'v' restrainer and 'Midas' stunning system, are not permitted.



**NEW** Moving pigs from a group into a single line and restraining them individually can be very stressful to pigs. The act of lifting the pigs makes the use of these restrainer conveyor systems even more stressful.

## Stunning and electrical stun-to-kill (electrocution)

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**S 8.1.4** **NEW** For two-cycle electrical stun-to-kill (electrocution), in the case of the heart stun the electrodes must be:

- a) placed so they span the heart from side-to-side or front-to-back
- b) applied immediately following the head stun
- c) applied for a minimum of 7 seconds.

**S 8.1.5** **NEW** In the case of two-cycle electrical stun-to-kill (electrocution), the head stun, heart stun and shackling must all be completed on each individual pig in turn before beginning the process on the next pig.

**S 8.2.2** **NEW** In the case of two-cycle electrical stun-to-kill (electrocution), if paddling movements are seen after the heart stun, similar to those seen after head-only electrical stunning (see the information box below standard S 8.2), a head stun must be applied again immediately, followed by another heart stun to prevent recovery.



**NEW** Signs of an effective stun/kill using the two-cycle electrical stun-to-kill (electrocution) method include:

- immediate collapse
- immediate onset of tonic phase (see information box below standard S 8.2 for more detail on the signs of this phase)
- immediate cessation of rhythmic breathing
- little or no clonic phase follows the tonic phase (see information box below standard S 8.2 for more detail on the signs of this phase)
- gradual appearance of relaxation of the body
- dilated pupils.

Forceful handling should be avoided as this could resuscitate the heart before or during bleeding.

## Gas killing

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**NEW** Whilst gas killing systems can offer some welfare advantages over alternative methods, such as calmer handling due to the automated nature of the system, the use of carbon dioxide gas, especially at high concentrations, is aversive to pigs. As such, exposure to high concentrations of carbon dioxide gas causes pain and distress to pigs prior to them losing consciousness. The RSPCA wants to see a rapid phaseout of the legal use of carbon dioxide gas killing systems in their current form, which is long overdue, and humane alternatives developed.

In light of further research and developments into humane alternatives, the RSPCA will review the timescale for a phase out within these standards and would like to see this happen as soon as practically possible.

## Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

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Below S(TV) 1.5



**NEW** The RSPCA is reviewing Intelligent Camera Surveillance systems for use in slaughter plants. These systems can alert relevant slaughter plant staff to potential welfare concerns in real time, allowing situations to be dealt with quickly and efficiently. They can also be used to identify areas where staff require additional training or where staff safety is at risk. It is strongly recommended that slaughter plants adopt such technologies to help further safeguard animal welfare in their plant. Where such technology is being considered, please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department for further information.