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Mobile slaughter or killing units for animals for
slaughter

Slaughter is the fate of most farm animals. It is important that wellbeing is respected, perhaps most especially at this stage of life. The regulations on this are European and, with correct compliance, provide adequate guarantees of the minimum welfare of the slaughter animals.

The Flemish Animal Welfare Council considers it useful to investigate and promote the possibilities for further improvements in respect of slaughter animals.

Prior to slaughter, farm animals experience considerable stress owing to handling, transport, stunning and slaughter in an unfamiliar environment. For lame, weak or wild individuals, these stress factors can be even greater.

For this reason, it is forbidden to transport animals that cannot be carried without causing excessive suffering, and they must be stunned and killed on site. However, the transport of these animals is one of the most common welfare violations in slaughterhouses, because farmers and transporters want to save the costs of euthanasia and, moreover, still think they can valorize the meat. In 2017, 61 of 76 reports concerning cattle in Flemish slaughterhouses were about the suitability for transport. For pigs, this was 55 out of 121 reports.

Article 3 of European regulations on animal welfare at the time of killing (Regulation 1099/2009) states that animals should be spared any avoidable form of pain, distress or suffering during slaughter or killing. For some animals, however, the stress in a slaughterhouse is so great that it is almost impossible to respect Article 3 within a conventional slaughterhouse environment (e.g. animals that were kept extensive and unused to contact with humans). These animals should be better slaughtered outside a slaughterhouse.

During the last century, several small slaughterhouses were closed, and as a result animals have to be transported over longer distances for slaughter. The increase in scale of the slaughterhouses makes it difficult to slaughter small numbers.

A mobile slaughter or killing unit could provide an answer to these problems.

With a fully equipped mobile slaughter unit the carcass is processed on site. In a mobile killing unit, the animals are stunned in or near the killing unit by the traditional stunning methods and subsequently bled. The carcass is then transported to a slaughterhouse for further handling. The blood is collected for hygiene reasons.

European Regulation 1099/2009 provides for the use of mobile slaughterhouses but lays down no further rules in this regard. This is left to the Member States.

In various European countries, mobile slaughter units already operate under private and government initiative (e.g. Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden).

The use of mobile slaughter and killing units can also stimulate sales via a shorter production chain.

The Flemish Council for Animal Welfare endorses the potential animal welfare benefits of mobile slaughter and killing units. It advocates for the creation of a legal framework to facilitate mobile slaughter with as many animal welfare safeguards as possible and to support initiatives to develop mobile slaughter and killing units.