

THE IMPORTANCE OF ANTE MORTEM INSPECTION

Ante mortem inspection is used as tool to screen all animals destined for slaughter. The inspector should ensure that animals are properly rested (minimum 1 hour) and that proper clinical information, which will assist in disease diagnosis and judgement, is obtained. Healthy, clean animals will reduce contamination on the slaughter floor. Therefor diseased and dirty animals are separated from healthy clean ones and placed in an isolation lairage to be slaughtered last.

Animals must be treated in a humane manner at all times. They should be offloaded immediately and placed in proper lairage facilities. During ante mortem inspection attention should be given to availability of clean drinking water, shelter (in the case of sheep and pigs), overloading of pens, cleanliness of pens and structural compliance. Animal handlers should be observed if possible while handling the animals. These handlers must be trained personnel. The meat inspector should also ensure that animal trucks are cleaned and in a good condition.

Injured animals or those with pain and suffering must undergo emergency slaughter. They must be slaughtered without delay and may have to be slaughtered in between other batches in order to reduce the time of suffering. It is therefore important that emergency slaughtered animals are marked so that they are identifiable from the rest of the other batches and can be detained for secondary meat inspection. Animals which are injured and cannot walk must be shot and bled where it is situated, on the vehicle or in the lairage and transported to the emergency slaughter area. A back-up stunning method must be available for situations where the animal needs to be stunned in the lairage or on the truck. This equipment must undergo regular maintenance to ensure proper functioning when needed. A way of transport must be available for any of the species should it be necessary to transport a carcass from the truck or lairage to the emergency slaughter entrance. The throat should be cut immediately after stunning in the lairage or on the truck. The area needs to be cleaned thoroughly immediately afterwards. The abattoir must have a written procedure in place which provides for the emergency slaughter of any of the species handled at the abattoir. The workers must be trained in this procedure.

The meat inspector has to identify animals with notifiable and controlled (Animal Health Act, 2002 (Act No.7 of 2002) animal diseases. All controlled diseases are notifiable and some notifiable diseases are controlled. In cases where a notifiable disease is identified or a suspicious animal is noticed, the state veterinarian must be informed immediately and the animal has to be detained. All animals suffering from a controlled disease must be moved to the abattoir under cover of a "red cross" permit issued by a state veterinarian at the farm and the arrival of the consignment at the abattoir must be confirmed to such state veterinarian. If an animal is suffering from or is suspected of suffering from a controlled disease or if any animal has tested positive on the farm for brucellosis or tuberculosis and bears a C or T brand mark, and is not accompanied by a "red cross" permit, a state veterinarian of the Provincial Directorate: Veterinary Services, in whose area the abattoir is situated, must be notified immediately

Declarations of Health and Origen must be received for all animals and should contain the date of delivery, name and address of owner or farm, number of animals and specie(s), health status of the herd(s) including mortality rate and medication, if given as well as withdrawal periods and dates. An animal may not be slaughtered if it is suspected that a forbidden substance may be present in the meat. These forbidden substances may include antibiotics, chemotherapeutic agents, insecticides and pesticides.

The findings made at Ante Mortem inspection are very important for a final judgement at primary meat inspection. Therefor all information obtained at ante mortem should be conveyed to primary meat inspection personnel.

No dead animals may be slaughtered. Dead on Arrival or Dead in Pen animals have to be treated as condemned material and a blood smear must be taken to rule out the possibility of Anthrax. If an animal's condition is such that it is not fit for slaughter the opinion of a veterinarian should be obtained who will then make a decision as to either slaughter, provisionally slaughter or dispose of the animal.

An animal which is on the point of giving birth or which has given birth in transit or lairage may not be slaughtered.

A Hygiene Management Program for Ante Mortem must be in place and must:

- (i) ensure that all animals which for some reason or other cannot be processed into safe meat are identified and handled in accordance with Part VIII;
- (ii) identify animals with diseases and conditions of which symptoms may not be visible during post-mortem meat inspections;
- (iii) identify animals with zoonotic diseases;
- (iv) identify animals with highly contagious diseases or diseases controlled under the Animal Health Act, 2002 (Act No. 7 of 2002); and
- (v) identify animals that pose a high contamination risk, such as those with septic conditions or animals that are excessively soiled; and
- (vi) ensure that injured animals in obvious pain are presented for emergency slaughter or preferential slaughter without undue delay.