



✉ High River PO Box 5201
#5 112 Centre Street
High River, AB T1V 1M4

☎ 403-652-5111
FAX: 403-663-3035
🌐 www.afac.ab.ca

📘 Alberta Farm Animal Care

🐦 @AbFarmAnimal

Alberta Farm Animal Care Backgrounder Slaughter Without Stunning

What is Slaughter Without Stunning (SwS)?

- Prior to conventional slaughter in Canadian abattoirs, animals are rendered insensible (“stunned”) using a variety of methods. Slaughter without stunning means that animals are not rendered insensible prior to slaughter. This is most commonly done in observance of certain religious requirements. Though not synonymous, it is sometimes called religious or ritual slaughter.
- *Dhabihah* is the method by which animals are slaughtered in order to produce halal meat for the Muslim community. *Shechita* is the method used to produce Kosher meat for the Jewish community. In either case, the religious requirements are that animals are alive, healthy and have suffered no injury at the time of slaughter. Some Islamic communities accept a stunning method, provided it does not kill the animals, based on their interpretations of religious requirements. A majority of halal meat production in Canada utilizes reversible stunning.
- For SwS, each animal is individually restrained – either manually or with equipment
- Animals are restrained upright, at 45 degrees, on their side, or on their backs, depending on the species and the country
- Some countries allow hoisting of animals prior to slaughter. This is not permitted in Canada.
- A knife is used to make a cut across the ventral neck with the intention to sever the carotid arteries and jugular veins
- Blood loss and loss of consciousness should be rapid
- Death should be confirmed before proceeding with further processing

What do we know about animal welfare and SwS?

- Pre-slaughter stunning (which includes reversible stunning) causes an animal to become insensible. The animal is still alive. This is generally perceived to be the best method to control anxiety, pain and suffering throughout the slaughter process.
- There are many methods of stunning – some of which are reversible. Reversible stunning most commonly involves application of an electrical current across the head of the animal, which causes insensibility while not affecting the heart. It is “reversible” in that the animal could regain sensibility if it were not then slaughtered.
- The concerns with SwS are: stress of restraint, whether the cut is painful, and whether the animal experiences undue distress while it is bleeding out
- If pre-slaughter stunning is not done, immediate post-cut stunning is a best practice, which will reduce the duration of animal suffering.
- Depending on the method of restraint (in some countries animals are turned on their backs), there can be struggling and vocalization, indicating fear, pain, or stress during restraint.
- Depending on the method of restraint and cut, and the competence of the individual performing the slaughter, loss of consciousness occurs within 30 seconds in bovines,





✉ High River PO Box 5201
#5 112 Centre Street
High River, AB T1V 1M4

📞 403-652-5111
FAX: 403-663-3035
🌐 www.afac.ab.ca

📘 Alberta Farm Animal Care

🐦 @AbFarmAnimal

15 seconds in sheep/goats, and under 15 seconds in poultry. If done incorrectly, however, loss of consciousness can be upwards of 160 seconds in bovines, 70 seconds in sheep, and over 20 seconds in poultry.

Development of a standard in Canada

- The market for meat slaughtered without stunning is expanding. Canadian regulation permits animals to be slaughtered in this way.
- There is currently no national standard for this procedure, thus what is acceptable can vary between provinces or among slaughter facilities.
- Provincial, territorial and federal governments were tasked with developing a consistent approach to ensure animal welfare and respect religious requirements. This resulted in the draft *Standards for Optimizing Animal Welfare Outcomes during Slaughter Without Stunning (SWS)*, which was developed by the SWS Working Group under the Council of Chief Veterinary Officers.
- Slaughter without stunning is considered a religious prerogative but there are concerns that the methods can compromise the welfare of animals.
- The proposed standard is science-based with the intention to improve animal welfare
- The proposed standard states that all animals, except birds, are restrained in an upright position
- The mammalian restraining device (used for cattle, sheep, and goats) should provide secure footing for the animal, allow animals to be held forward using a pusher, allow animals to fit comfortably into a forehead bracket and chin lift, and allow adequate access to the head and neck for accurate neck cutting and bleeding
- It is suggested that birds not be shackled unless they are being stunned before cutting the neck; the best practice for birds is for one person to hold the bird while another person performs the cut
- The proposed standard states that an animal be restrained only when the slaughter person is ready to perform the cut; the neck cut must then be completed without delay
 - The cut should be a single pull stroke or, with large ruminants, a single pull and push stroke
- Blood loss should be rapid enough to cause a rapid loss of sensibility
- The proposed standard suggests bovines be stunned immediately if they do not collapse or lose sensibility within 30 seconds post-cut. This number is 15 seconds for small ruminants.
- The proposed standard states that animals must be insensible before they are moved or manipulated
- The proposed standard states that animals must be insensible before the restraining device is released
- The proposed standard states that animals must not be wholly or partially suspended until the animal is insensible





✉ High River PO Box 5201
#5 112 Centre Street
High River, AB T1V 1M4

☎ 403-652-5111
FAX: 403-663-3035
🌐 www.afac.ab.ca

📘 Alberta Farm Animal Care

🐾 @AbFarmAnimal

Regulations in other countries

- In the UK, both Halal slaughter and shechita (Jewish religious slaughter) may be carried out without stunning provided that the slaughter is done by someone with a certificate of competence and that the meat is intended for consumption by Jews or Muslims.
- In New Zealand, Halal slaughter must use reversible stunning prior to bleeding. Kosher slaughter is the only form of slaughter exempt from the requirement to pre-stun; however, regulation requires a post-stun be applied within 5 seconds of the neck cut for cattle.
- In Australia, it is recommended that animals be pre-stunned before bleeding (many Halal operations use reversible pre-stunning). However, the regulation allows animals to be slaughtered without stunning under “Islamic or Judaic rites”.
- In the EU, regulation allows for existing slaughter methods with no stunning, for religious reasons. Member states have the freedom to impose stricter rules if they so desire. Some countries prohibit slaughter without stunning (Sweden, Norway, Denmark).
- In the US, religious slaughter of all kinds is allowed.

Conclusions

- The proposed standard was open for public consultation from November 28, 2016 to January 27, 2017. Feedback provided is now under review and the standard will be revised accordingly.
- AFAC provided feedback on the draft standard in an effort to help strengthen the standard as it moves forward. Animal welfare was very much at the forefront of the proposed standard but there were some areas that could be improved.
- It is unreasonable to think that SwS will be banned in Canada. It is reasonable to work with our Muslim and Jewish communities on allowing a reversible stun or post-cut stunning.

References

Gregory, N.G. 2005. Recent concerns about stunning and slaughter. *Meat Sci.* 70:481-491.

Gregory, N.G., H.R. Fielding, M. von Wenzlawowicz, and K. von Holleben. 2010. Time to collapse following slaughter without stunning in cattle. *Meat Sci.* 85:66-69.

Nakyinsige, K., Y.B. Che Man, Zeiad A. Aghwan, I. Zulkifli, Y.M. Goh, F. Abu Bakar, H.A. Al-Kahtani, and A.Q. Sazili. 2013. Stunning and animal welfare from Islamic and scientific perspectives. *Meat Sci.* 95:352-361.

Velarde, A., P. Rodriguez, A. Dalmau, C. Fuentes, P. Llonch, K.V. von Holleben, M.H. Anil, J.B. Lambooi, H. Pleiter, T. Yesildere, and B.T. Cenci-Goga. 2014. Religious slaughter: Evaluation of current practices in selected countries. *Meat Sci.* 96:278-287.

