



A Dirty Business

Monitoring adherence to biosecurity regulations at livestock markets following the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak



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Scope of our survey

Animal Aid has been monitoring the welfare of animals at markets since 1993. Between June 2003 and March 2004, members of our MarketWatch network (adhering to all biosecurity restrictions) monitored 13 markets in England and Wales to determine if the post-foot and mouth biosecurity measures were being observed; and whether those rules were equal to the task of ensuring that markets would not, in future, pave the way for another animal disease epidemic. Our monitors, additionally, assessed whether - in the new post-f&m climate - the welfare of animals at markets was taken more or less seriously.

The markets covered included Longtown and Hexham, both of which were integrally linked to the 2001 epidemic. The others were at Ashford, Bulth Wells, Carlisle, Chippenham, Frome, Holsworthy, Penrith, Salisbury, Talgarth, Taunton and Worcester.



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Cover picture: **Frome market, Somerset**

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Summary

Biosecurity breaches

This is Animal Aid's fourth major report on livestock markets.

Animal Aid MarketWatchers visited 13 sales between June 2003 and March 2004 to monitor adherence to biosecurity measures that had been introduced to prevent another outbreak of foot and mouth (f&m) disease, or similar catastrophe. Markets were shown to have played a central role in the wide and rapid dissemination of f&m, due to the large number of animals who pass through them - often to far-flung locations. As a consequence, they were shut down during the 2001 outbreak and its immediate aftermath.

Markets observed were at Ashford, Builth Wells, Carlisle, Chippenham, Frome, Hexham, Holsworthy, Longtown, Penrith, Salisbury, Talgarth, Taunton and Worcester.

At each market, we saw the most basic biosecurity rule being disregarded. This requires that everyone disinfects his or her footwear on leaving the animal area.¹ Workers and market users alike failed to observe this requirement, even though disinfectant dips were provided and there were often reminder posters.



Non-observance of this key rule was even found at Longtown market, which a report by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) identified as the epicentre of the 2001 f&m outbreak.

Failure to obey the rule was so commonplace that one undercover Animal Aid market monitor reports having to conceal the fact that he WAS dipping his boots, for fear that his diligence would expose him as an outsider.

The dipping-footwear rule is the one unambiguous

edict remaining from a far more comprehensive package of biosecurity measures that were introduced by the government when markets began reopening in February 2002. The initial 'interim' rules also curbed the unhygienic handling of successive batches of animals; over-garments and footwear had to be of a type that was easily disinfected; and 20 days had to pass before animals bought at market could be moved to another location.

These interim measures gradually became diluted and less effective. Then, in Spring 2003, the government proposed tightening the rules - to include, notably, compulsory attendance of vets at all sales. But the livestock industry rebelled, even though it had previously complained that the government's lack of vigilance and disease control measures were factors that produced the 2001 outbreak.

When the updated rules were implemented in August 2003, they were weaker rather than stronger than what preceded them.

The only clear rule remaining intact relates to footwear disinfection and, as our investigation shows, this is being widely flouted.

Officials involved in the enforcement of biosecurity rules have told us that they share Animal Aid's concerns about the relaxation of the original rules.

The non-observance of weak and ambiguous biosecurity measures means that the risk of another disease epidemic is current and substantial.

Animal welfare breaches

Our new survey also demonstrates that ill treatment and neglect of animals remain distressingly common at markets.

Sheep, in particular, are still confined in overcrowded pens. They are often packed together so tightly that they are unable to rest and must stand all day. *'The indoor pen area, which measured approximately 12 by 8 foot, contained 25 sheep. The fleeced sheep filled every square inch of the pen and could barely move. One sheep tried to move but was forced upwards and stood on her back legs leaning on others for at least half a minute before squeezing back down.'* Frome, 3rd September 2003

MarketWatch monitors observed many diseased and injured animals at the sales. They saw swellings, bleeding cuts and abscesses. *'One sheep showed a swelling on her left flank that was approximately the size of a football. The auctioneer referred to the animal as "lumpy". There was no clarification of the animal's condition.'* Frome, 27th August 2003



Frome market, Somerset

Not only is this neglectful in animal welfare terms, but it is also a breach of biosecurity rules, which specify that sick animals must be isolated and receive prompt veterinary attention.

Many animals were observed being subjected to wanton cruelty. They were hit, kicked, crushed by gates and poked with sticks. *'Dairy cattle were unloaded. One cow had the pen gate rammed against her leg, she was kicked under the chin and neck as well as under her udder and back legs.'* Taunton, 30th September 2003

For some, the suffering of the animals is a joke. *'A cull ewe collapsed and died very quickly in front of me. The pen cleaners moved her on a trolley with her feet sticking up in the air, which was thought hilarious by some. She had been seen fitting, but had been left.'* Ashford, 23rd September 2003

Animals were also forced to cross slippery surfaces, often stumbling or falling to their knees.

Conclusions

The findings in this report, relating to both welfare and biosecurity, reinforce Animal Aid's longstanding position on markets. We continue to seek to encourage people to adopt an animal-free diet. But for so long as animals are raised and slaughtered for meat and dairy products, we believe that they should be spared the wholly unnecessary additional hardship of a day at market. When animals are under extreme stress, their health becomes compromised and they fall prey to epidemics such as foot and mouth disease. Biosecurity rules at livestock sales must be heeded in order to prevent another catastrophe, which would cause more hardship for the animals, and cost the taxpayer dearly.



Frome market, Somerset

Introduction

In 2001, the UK experienced the worst outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in living memory. It was the latest in a long line of major disease outbreaks that had recently affected farmed animals, including salmonella, E coli, bovine TB, campylobacter, BSE and swine fever. For eight months the epidemic raged across the country. Livestock movements and sales were stopped, and for a while markets closed their doors.

When they began reopening in February 2002, new biosecurity rules were in place aimed at ensuring no such disease catastrophe could occur again.² Everyone attending markets, whether auctioneer, market worker, dealer, lorry driver or farmer, was required to comply. Over-garments that could be easily cleansed and disinfected had to be worn; footwear needed to be suitable for disinfecting; this footwear had to be dipped in tubs of disinfectant when leaving animal areas; and the tyres, mudflaps and wheel arches of vehicles had to be disinfected prior to leaving the market itself.

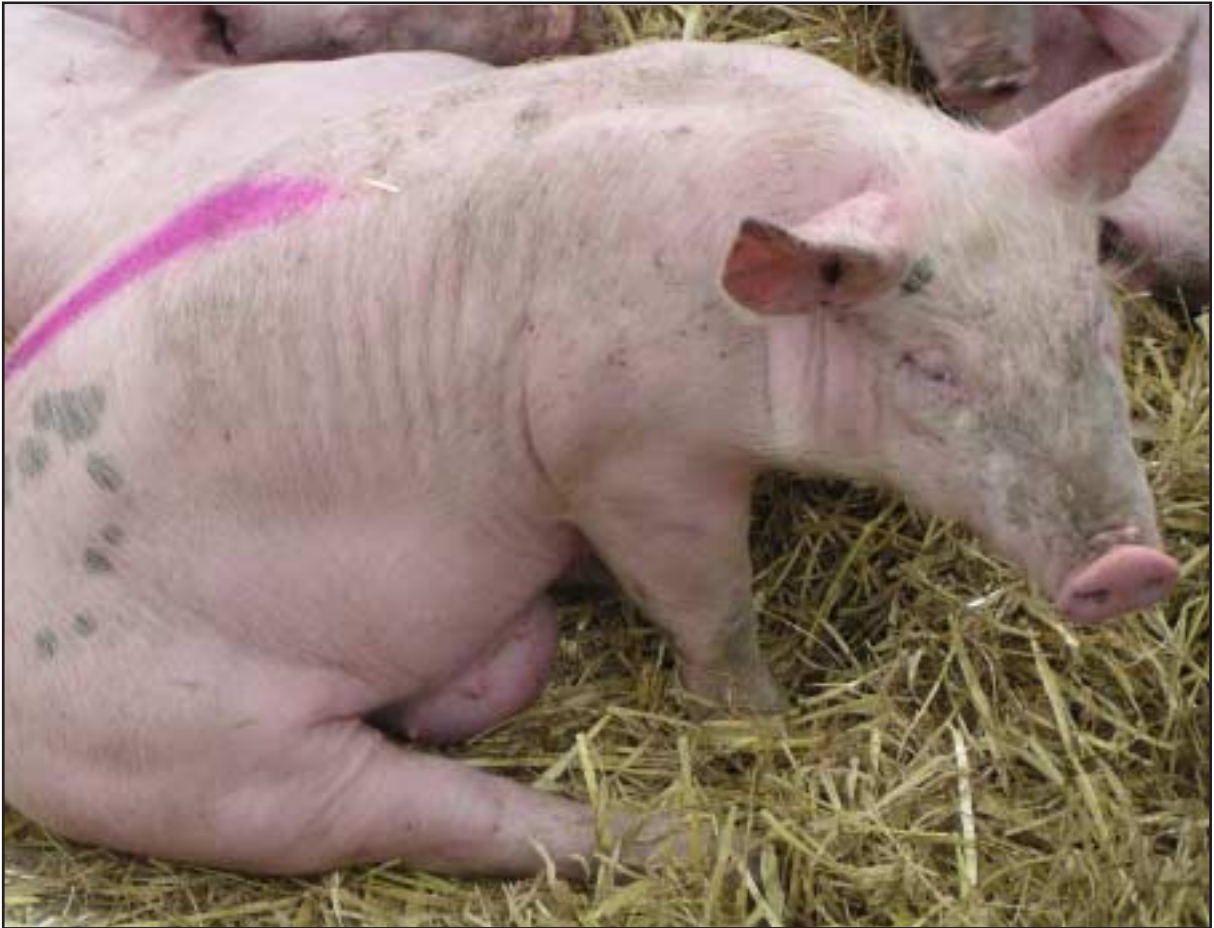
In spring 2003, according to *Farmers' Weekly*, the government proposed tightening these biosecurity rules. It wanted compulsory attendance of vets at all sales and a ban on animals being kept overnight. But farming and market representatives rebelled. They were reported to be 'unanimously opposed to the government's plan', citing the extra expense and inconvenience such measures would involve (FW, May23/June13 2003).

When the new version of the biosecurity rules was introduced in August last year, it was clear that industry lobbyists had prevailed. Instead of being more robust, the new measures were more lax. They were also more ambiguous and, therefore, harder to enforce.

There is currently no clear ruling about compulsory attendance of vets, while the proposal to ban animals being kept overnight also seems to have been abandoned.

In addition, visitors and market workers are now no longer obliged to wear protective outer-garments, such as overalls. They simply have to ensure that their clothing can be easily cleansed and disinfected; or else - if their clothing does become soiled - that they have clean clothes to change into once they leave the animal area.

Handling of livestock is permitted, provided that the handling is kept to a minimum.



Salisbury market, Wiltshire

It was originally required that vehicles had to be cleansed and disinfected on market premises. Now, however, the vehicle operator can claim that on-site cleaning is not practical and he/she can select to sign a declaration saying cleaning will take place within 24 hours at a specified location. Enforcing such a rule is clearly extremely difficult, notwithstanding the fact that drivers are told that they are subject to spot checks. Our soundings suggest that this dilution of the vehicle-washing rule is causing alarm amongst experienced animal health officers.

There has also been a weakening of the 'standstill' rule relating to newly-purchased animals. The original decree demanded that 20 days had to lapse before animals bought at market could be sent to another sale or on to another farmer/dealer for further 'fattening'. This was to ensure that any disease they might be harbouring had a chance to show itself. But whereas a 20 day standstill continues to apply to pigs, for other farmed animals, the interval has been reduced to only six days.

As well as a weakening of the overall biosecurity regime, some of the new edicts are so ambiguously stated that they are open to lax interpretations. What clothes, for instance, are 'easily cleansed and disinfected'? How much animal handling can be said to be 'minimal'?

One clear, unambiguous rule that does remain relates to dipping of footwear: all attending markets must dip their feet in the disinfectant tubs provided before leaving the animal area.

The new licensing arrangement for markets presents further problems. Each sale must now operate under a licence issued by DEFRA. The licensee is responsible for ensuring that the new biosecurity rules are adhered to, including taking 'all reasonable steps to prevent the spread of disease onto, in and off of the premises during the animal gathering'.

The day-to-day application of this requirement is the central function of a biosecurity officer - who can be the licensee him/herself, or some other nominated individual. The problem with this arrangement - as anyone familiar with livestock markets will appreciate - is that the appointed individual will almost certainly be working during the sale (e.g. as auctioneer or in the ring) and will, therefore, be unable to monitor and enforce compliance with the new rules.



The MarketWatchers' reports

At all locations, our monitors observed a failure to adhere to the key edict relating to the disinfecting of footwear when leaving animal areas.

The monitors were also of the view - supported by experienced animal health officers working for local authorities, to whom we have spoken - that the post-August 2003 package of biosecurity measures are seriously deficient. In succumbing to industry pressure and weakening the original rules, the government has increased the prospects of livestock markets once again being at the centre of a future animal disease outbreak. The government weakened in the face of pressure from farming interests, even though that industry is likely, as in the past, to blame any such future outbreak on lack of government action.

Our survey also strongly indicates that animal welfare is of no greater importance to market users than before foot and mouth. Animals were still taken to sales suffering from disease and injury. They continue to be beaten, deprived of water and confined in overcrowded pens.

Biosecurity

'On a number of occasions whilst dipping my boots, I have seen individuals looking at me, followed by comment amongst themselves ending in an expression of humour. I found myself checking to see if anyone was around so as to not stand out when disinfecting my footwear.' North East Area MarketWatcher

Disinfecting footwear

The Rules for Livestock Movements August 2003 clearly state; 'DON'T leave the animal area without cleansing or disinfecting your footwear' (emphasis in original). This is intended to prevent the spread of disease from animals on sale to those in other locations to which the market user might next be going. Yet at every market, monitors saw consistent breaking of this simple rule. Although footbaths for the disinfecting of footwear were provided - some with signs pointing out the need for dipping - they were not observed being used. A large proportion of market users were wearing footwear (e.g. trainers or sandals) that was not actually suitable for dipping.

'In the livestock unloading bay, I randomly picked out and watched three vehicles unload their animals. None of the drivers disinfected their footwear when they left to get back into their vehicles. None of the drivers was challenged by market staff.' Salisbury, 2nd September 2003

'Drivers consistently failed to disinfect their footwear.' Chippenham, 25th September 2003

'I saw no disinfection of footwear by drivers at the market.' Taunton, 30th September 2003

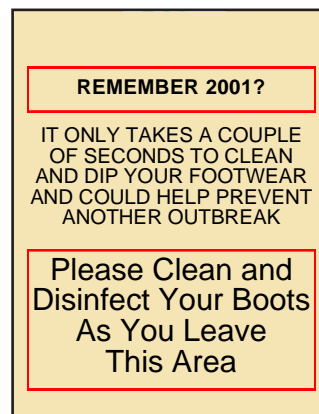
'Throughout the summer, people not dipping their footwear has been a particular problem, with some wearing sandals and their children being reluctant to dip their trainers.' Ashford MarketWatcher

'There was a disinfection tub with a request for all to disinfect footwear. I watched randomly a few dozen people walk through without disinfecting. Many of those had footwear not suitable for disinfection.' Carlisle, 15th October 2003

Clothing

Before the relaxation of the biosecurity measures, outer-garments, such as overalls, had to be worn by those working at, or attending, a livestock sale. The rules now simply state that the clothing must be easily cleansed and disinfected. They also require that no clothing contaminated with animal excreta can be worn into the market and if clothing does become soiled during the sale, it must be cleaned before the wearer leaves the market premises; or else the individual must change into clean clothing on leaving the animal area. But the question as to what clothing is suitable - jeans, for instance - is open to interpretation.

'A vendor wearing training shoes and jeans entered the auction ring - neither seemed suitable for disinfecting.' Hexham, 14th October 2003



Sample biosecurity reminder poster

Cleansing of vehicles prior to leaving market

Prior to the relaxation of the biosecurity rules, all vehicles leaving market had to have their tyres, wheel arches and mud flaps properly cleansed and disinfected. However, many markets (particularly small, rural ones) claimed that they did not have the capacity to cope with this requirement and that it caused long queues of vehicles waiting to leave the premises.

The rules were consequently relaxed so that individuals can now cleanse and disinfect their vehicles after leaving the market, providing that they sign a declaration saying where the cleaning will take place and that, if they have unloaded animals, they will carry it out within 24 hours.



Salisbury market, Wiltshire

At the markets our monitors visited, cleansing and disinfection facilities were provided, but those we found making use of them often fell short of doing what the Order requires.

'When livestock vehicles left the loading area they would head to the market's exit and slow down to a fast crawl whilst a person either side sprayed the lorry's outer tyres and made what appeared to be a token attempt at spraying other parts of the chassis. Each disinfection procedure only took around 5 seconds.' Frome, 27th August 2003

'One operative accepted a bag off a lady at the disinfection site, chatted for a minute and then walked back to his post without having sprayed the vehicle at all.' Frome, 3rd September 2003

Handling animals

The biosecurity rules introduced when markets first reopened required that people should not touch one lot of animals and then another.

The updated rules say simply that 'handling animals must be kept to a minimum' and only those with a 'legitimate reason' can touch them (e.g. approved vendors and buyers). The 'licensees must take steps to control unnecessary handling of animals'.³ However, no more is said to clarify how much handling is considered to be of a 'minimum'.

Many potential vendors physically touch and squeeze sheep in an attempt to gain an idea of the condition of the animals and their possible value. Our MarketWatchers observed this behaviour in most of the markets.

'With sheep there is a technique of condition scoring whereby the animal is physically touched/gripped on her back so giving a general indication of the condition, which will relate to her potential value. Most, if not all, of the sheep dealers will touch animals during a market day and will sometimes touch a sheep's mouth area to check the animal's teeth. This practice was used at this market.' Hexham, 14th October 2003

'None of the people handling sheep seem to be wearing suitable clothing or footwear for disinfection and their hands alone are potential reservoirs of disease.' Longtown, 16th October 2003



Animal welfare

Over-crowding

In most markets, sheep, in particular, are kept in over-crowded pens. They are confined in conditions so cramped that they often cannot lie down and must therefore stand on stone floors for the many hours they are on the premises.

'The indoor pen area, which measured approximately 12 by 8 foot, contained 25 sheep. The fleeced sheep filled every square inch of the pen and could barely move. One sheep tried to move but was forced upwards and stood on her back legs leaning on others for at least half a minute before squeezing back down (photo below).' Frome, 3rd September 2003

Lack of water

Like all mammals, farmed animals need a regular supply of water. Without it they become dehydrated and suffer ill effects. However, animals brought to market generally go all day without water. The Code of Practice accompanying the Welfare of Animals at Markets Order (1990) states that animals staying overnight must be given water, but it does not say that it is necessary to provide animals with water during the day. This is true even through the blistering summer heat. Some animals will be brought to market at 7am and do not leave until 5pm or later, without having any liquid during this time. If they are loaded for the journey to sale in the early hours of the morning and have a long distance to cover after leaving, they can go 20 hours or more without water.

'I have seen animals who have escaped from pens drinking out of disinfection buckets.' Worcester MarketWatcher

'No water is given to any of the animals whilst at market. No concessions were made with water during the very hot weather.' Ashford MarketWatcher



Frome market, Somerset



Slippery/dangerous surfaces

A persisting problem, highlighted by our MarketWatchers in previous reports, is that of animals being forced to walk across slippery surfaces. In most cases, even when animals keep losing their footing, no extra straw or dusting is provided. For some market users, the sight of animals slipping is a source of amusement.

'There was a sparse covering of straw in the cattle rings. At times animals were slipping. One animal came into the ring very nervous and ran from one side of the ring to the other barely keeping on his feet.' Frome, 3rd September 2003

'Whilst the sheep were being auctioned, a ceramic cup was knocked off a post and smashed on the floor of a sheep pen containing animals. The crowd, including the auctioneer, joked about the mishap and then everyone turned straight back to the auction. There was no attempt by anyone to pick up the broken pieces (including many small, sharp, splinter-like fragments) that posed a risk to the animals in the pen. I waited for the auction to move along the pens and managed to clear them up.' Salisbury 2nd September 2003

'The beef auction ring showed numerous small potholes (up to 2 inches deep) randomly occurring around its circumference. There was also a sparse covering of straw that quickly became slippery to the animals. Many slipped as they entered the ring, most slipped whilst in the ring and at least two animals lost their footing completely - one landing on his knees and the other rolling on to his side. No extra straw was added.' Chippenham, 28th August 2003

'One particular animal, who was extremely nervous, ran into the auction ring and immediately panicked. He ran from side to side, smelling the air and vocalising and slipped a number of times. The people around the ring cheered and laughed. He ran out of the ring at speed and again slipped in the exit.' Frome, 24th September 2003



Diseased and injured animals at market

MarketWatchers reported seeing many animals suffering from injury and disease. They observed some with physical abscesses or swellings and others with bleeding wounds sustained while at the market itself. In all cases, market workers and users showed little or no concern for the animals' plight.

'One sheep had a severe injury to her right ear as well as a smaller injury to her left (photo p.6). The injuries were noted when the animal was auctioned but in relation to the animal's value as opposed to her welfare.' Salisbury, 2nd September 2003

'A sheep showed a swelling on her left flank that was approximately the size of a football (photo p.2). The auctioneer referred to the animal as "lumpy". There was no clarification of the animal's condition.' Frome, 27th August 2003



Chippenham market, Wiltshire

'One particular pig had a conspicuous growth on his abdomen (photo p.4).' Salisbury, 2nd September 2003

'Of significant note was an animal who was severely lame. The sheep was reluctant to put any weight on her left foreleg and held it in a completely unnatural way. This behaviour carried on continuously whilst I was at the market. She was obviously in a great deal of discomfort and was left to fend for herself.' Talgarth, 12th March 2004

'A dead sheep was left lying against an outer wall adjoining the livestock unloading area. She had yellow/white fluid oozing from her nostrils.' Longtown, 16th October 2003

'A cull ewe collapsed and died very quickly in front of me. The pen cleaners moved her on a trolley with her feet sticking up in the air, which was thought hilarious by some. She had been seen fitting, but been left.' Ashford, 23rd September 2003

Acts of violence towards and abuse of animals

The government's Strategy for the Protection of Animal Welfare at Livestock Markets (introduced in 1998) draws attention to specific acts that constitute unacceptable treatment. These include kicking, tail twisting and dragging animals. The current survey shows that animals at markets continue to be beaten, poked, kicked, slammed into with gates, sworn at and generally abused by those handling them.

'One person handling cows twisted around and clumped up a cow's tail who was reluctant to move forward. The man's hands were contaminated with faeces and he continued to handle other animals without washing his hands. Not only was he harming the animals, but he was also potentially spreading disease from one to another.' Frome, 27th August 2003

'I saw many cattle being poked with sticks to "encourage" them to move on.' Chippenham, 25th September 2003

'Over 150 Holsteins were up for auction today. They were promoted by the auctioneers in terms of their individual milk output. The majority of these animals in milk were dripping/squirting from their udders.' Taunton, 7th October 2003

'Dairy cattle were unloaded. One cow had the pen gate rammed against her leg; she was kicked under the chin and neck as well as under her udder and back legs.' Taunton, 30th September 2003

'One group of people were extremely brutal with the animals. For the best part of the day I could hear them shouting and swearing at the animals, with the sounds of sticks contacting animals.' Holsworthy, 1st October 2003



Chippenham market, Wiltshire

A special report from Newton Abbot livestock market (29.10.03)

A Brutal Business report was published by Animal Aid six years ago for which we helped gain evidence of the cruelty and law breaking at livestock markets. Since then, Animal Aid has produced another report, which we did not participate in, the reason being that the trauma of gaining evidence for A Brutal Business had seriously affected us. So it has been some time since we have been in markets and certainly not since foot and mouth. I did smugly feel that with all the publicity that had surrounded the reports that markets would have changed for the better.

Newton Abbot livestock market this morning was a bitter disappointment. We hear the bellowing of frightened animals; see cows apparently trying to protect their young, and what I take to be the look of terror from animals peering out of the lorries as they arrive at the market.

Obviously our senses are heightened and we recognise this stress. But over the past few years, surely the world has moved on! Within the EU law it has been recognised that animals are sentient creatures with perceptions and feeling. Better training is needed for those who handle animals. Depressingly, none of this seems to have influenced Newton Abbot. To us, it seemed even worse than we could remember six years ago.

As soon as the tailgates were pulled down, the cattle were poked through the vents of the lorry to get them moving. They were then hit with sticks over the head and backs, poked in the backside into pens. Even when they were moving forward, they had to be hit. Putting them into the race was even more brutal. Not visiting this market on a regular basis we cannot say if this was just a bad day and they were new drovers, but we wouldn't be surprised to discover that this was a regular occurrence.

Trading standards, we believe, were in an office. Someone did emerge after the auction had finished but only after my fellow MarketWatcher shouted out to stop the animals continually being hit over the head. Sadly, one felt he decided to act only because of our presence; and that he had become desensitised and part of the market culture - despite any good intentions he may have had at the beginning.

There was no water in the pens. There was disinfectant for spraying lorry wheels and for foot baths – but we saw people going in and out of the market ignoring the signs to dip feet. The other MarketWatcher and I felt very depressed: all the hard work that has been done in the past to change the brutal culture of livestock markets and nothing seems to have changed at this market.

The History of MarketWatch

It has been ten years since Animal Aid published its first report, called *Auctioning Animal Flesh*, based on visits to five randomly chosen markets. The report showed that animals were being frequently denied water, beaten, driven across slippery surfaces and kept in overcrowded pens. It also revealed that many animals were brought to market sick or injured. *Auctioning Animal Flesh* gave birth to Animal Aid's MarketWatch monitoring network. It is thanks to these dedicated individuals and their hard work that all our reports have been possible.

Our second report, *A Brutal Business*, published in 1997, demonstrated that there had been some slight improvement in markets over the four years since the publication of the first dossier. Nonetheless, emaciated, diseased and lame animals were still consistently being taken to market. Random acts of violence - such as kicking, hitting and using electric goads - were still rife. Animals were still pushed over slippery surfaces and deprived of water.

In September 1998, prompted in large part by our second report, the government launched its new Strategy for the Protection of Animal Welfare at Livestock Markets. This document mainly reiterated previous laws that Animal Aid MarketWatchers had seen consistently flouted over the years. However, it did require that, on at least 25 per cent of market days, vets from the State Veterinary Service (SVS) would be present. This meant that independent practitioners would be on hand, hopefully to provide an impartial service that local commercial vets could not, for fear of making themselves unpopular with their clients by - for instance - declaring animals unfit for slaughter because they were injured or disease-ridden.

The Strategy also compelled market operators to keep 'Incidents Books' to be made available to SVS and local authority officers. These books would record injuries, sickness, lack of water and poor animal handling.

2001 saw the launch of our third report, called *Bartered Lives*. It set out to investigate how well the Strategy was being implemented. Our MarketWatchers monitored 15 English markets. The survey revealed that an increased number of 'surplus' emaciated and neglected animals were being taken to sale. This was put down to the financial hardship experienced by farmers and dealers.

This report also showed how conditions for many animals were still just as bad as before. The violence continued - with sticks and electric goads in frequent use. The majority of animals were still being deprived of water. The number of injured and diseased animals remained high. There was lack of adequate enforcement of animal welfare legislation.



Appendix 2:

Foot and mouth disease: the story of the 2001 epidemic

In February 2001, foot-and-mouth disease hit the UK. During the course of the eight-month epidemic there were 2,030 confirmed cases and more than six million animals were destroyed.

The disease

Foot and mouth is a highly contagious viral disease that mainly affects hooved animals, such as sheep, cows and pigs. It is caused and transmitted by picornavirus. There are seven main and numerous sub-strains.

The first symptom tends to be sudden lameness. Blisters will also develop on the nose, tongue, lips and feet. In dairy cows, mastitis is common, their milk yield drops and sterility may follow.

The effect that the disease has on animals varies according to their health and condition prior to infection. Modern systems of animal production, feeding and milking have produced animals who are under a great deal of physiological stress and therefore prone to the most severe symptoms of f&m and other such diseases.

Before the outbreak was detected, bodily fluid on footwear and farm vehicles carrying animals to and from markets and abattoirs helped to spread the disease from one farm to another. The practice of taking sheep from market to market, in an attempt to extract an extra few pounds, intensified the problem. The disease is also thought to have spread through airborne droplets from one farm to another.

The 'cull'

As the Ministry of Agriculture admitted in May 2001 (four months after the outbreak started), in 95% of cases, animals who were previously healthy before contracting the disease, survive it. Foot and mouth is rarely fatal, except in the case of very young animals.

However, in order to try and stop the outbreak, within weeks of the first confirmed case, the government ordered a mass cull of animals. The army was called in to help. It was estimated to be the 'biggest combined civil and military exercise in more than 30 years'.⁴



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© North News & Pictures; Charlie Hedley

The killing of sheep and cows was a public demonstration of the suffering that factory-farmed animals have to endure behind closed doors in slaughterhouses. However, the fate of the foot-and-mouth disease victims was worse.

There is evidence that animals, having been shot with captive bolt guns, were recovering consciousness and experiencing their own slow deaths piled up with their fellows. While still alive, according to reports, the victims were being drenched with disinfectant. They were recovering consciousness because the guns - which fire retractable bolts - are stunning rather than killing devices. In abattoirs they are used in an attempt to 'render animals insensible' before they are killed by having their throats cut. A great many sheep and cattle, under the f&m slaughter programme, were merely shot with this stunning device.

The army's involvement in the ultra-rapid disposal of hundreds of thousands of sheep also raised the real and horrifying prospect of animals being buried alive.

Young pigs, lambs and calves, whose skulls are too soft for the captive bolt, were killed by being injected directly into their hearts (intra-cardiac). This is a painful and traumatic procedure that the American Veterinary Medical Association outlaws, except where animals are heavily-sedated, unconscious or anaesthetised.

Disposal of the bodies

Across the country, dead bodies were piled onto huge bonfires that took days to burn. Other animals were buried in enormous mass graves.

For weeks after the outbreak began, all areas around Longtown were choked by smoke from these fires that had been started using toxic chemicals, such as kerosene, creosote and red diesel.

Burying animals also causes environmental problems as it can lead to the pollution of nearby underground water reserves.

How the outbreak started

There have been numerous suggestions regarding the outbreak's origin. The army was accused of bringing it in from a foreign country and some suspected that a phial containing the virus had been obtained from Porton Down.⁵ The head of the National Farmers' Union, Ben Gill, tried to blame eco-terrorists.⁶ DEFRA claimed that it came to Britain through the illegal import of meat from the Far East. While we will never be certain about the source of the 2001 outbreak, it can be confidently stated that a combination of animal neglect, poor regulation relating to the transportation of farmed animals, and the disease-friendly environment of the market system all contributed to its rapid spread.

Burnside Farm

The horrific conditions in which animals were kept in a Northumberland farm contributed to the initial outbreak.

At Burnside Farm, the owner, Bobby Waugh, took sows from other pig units around the country - animals who were too worn out to have more piglets. He fattened them up and sent them for slaughter. His farm was licensed to feed his animals 'processed waste food', or pigswill, under the Animal Byproducts Order of 1999.

Waugh's pigs were kept in squalid conditions, lying in their own faeces. Dead pigs were left to rot in walkways, others lay submerged in muck. Later, he was to be prosecuted for animal cruelty and banned from keeping livestock for 15 years.

On 20th February 2001, a pig at Cheale's abattoir in Essex was found to have foot-and-mouth disease. The pig was traced back to Waugh's farm. The Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) vet discovered that all Waugh's pigs were very ill from f&m and had been for a long time.⁷

The National Farmers' Union was forced to admit that something went 'badly wrong' on Waugh's farm. According to a BBC news report, 'this farm was known to MAFF and to trading standards as not the best managed pig farm in Northumberland. They had several opportunities to close it down and they failed to.'⁸ Although infected pigs were taken to Cheale's abattoir in Essex, according to DEFRA, this made a 'small contribution' to the epidemic's spread. The main outbreak was said to have been triggered by the virus spreading airborne to Prestwick Hall Farm, Ponteland, a farm close to Waugh's operation.

Sixteen sheep from Prestwick, while incubating the virus, were sent to Hexham market for sale on 13th February 2001. Here they were split into different lots - one going to a dealer who sent the sheep to his home farm in Lancashire. Here, the disease was confirmed on 27th February. A second Prestwick Hall lot was sold to the farmer/dealer and livestock exporter Willie Cleave.

The epicentre: Longtown market

The sheep bought by Cleave, along with others he owned, were kept at Longtown market, before being shipped down to one of his many farms in Devon. Longtown became contaminated and was subsequently highlighted as being the epicentre of the outbreak.

From Longtown, the disease spread rapidly around the country, through 'the movement of infected animals or through contamination of vehicles and people. The bulk of infected animals passing through markets went through Longtown market; some infected sheep passed through more than one market.'⁹ Between the 14th and 23rd of February, nearly 25,000 sheep were said to have passed through Longtown, and were thus exposed to the virus. DEFRA believes that the movement of contaminated sheep from this market 'accounted directly for the infection of at least 71 premises, including 20 sheep dealers' premises in Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway, Devon, Durham, Hereford and Lancashire and three abattoirs - one in Wales (Anglesey) and two in Durham by 23rd February'.¹⁰

On 23rd February, all movement of livestock had been stopped. However, many farms were already infected. The foot-and-mouth disease 'hot spots', such as Cumbria, Devon and Dumfries and Galloway, directly reflected the original distribution of sheep from Longtown market. Together, these hotspot areas accounted for more than three-quarters of the total number of foot and mouth outbreaks.¹¹

Payouts

At the beginning of the crisis, farmers were allowed to select a valuer to calculate the compensation that they were 'owed'. This resulted in the vast majority of farmers receiving levels of compensation that far exceeded the value of the culled stock. Not until five months after the outbreak began did the government insist that farmers use independent valuers. In its March 2003 report on these compensation payments, the House of Commons public accounts committee stated that farmers were being 'paid six times the going rate for land, and valuers and slaughterers and vets all demanded and received higher fees'.¹²

Foot and mouth millionaires sprung up all over the country. The biggest payment went to a farmer in Scotland who received more than £4 million. Willie Cleave, the farmer whose livestock movements were reported to be a significant factor leading to the spread of the disease, received a £1 million payout.



In March 2001, *Farmers' Weekly* described how the infection could easily be passed on from diseased animals to those not yet infected, by wiping the mouth of the ill animal with a cloth and then rubbing the cloth onto the healthy animal. 'Although illegal,' the magazine explained, 'the practice demonstrates how desperate some producers are to secure what they believe is fair compensation.'¹³



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1. The definition of an animal area is given [in Statutory Instrument 2003 No. 1723 4 (3) (c)] as being 'the area to which animals are given access'. This is further defined as including 'pens, runs, sale rings, loading and off-loading areas and ramps' by the Animal Gatherings (England) Order 2003 Guidance on implementing the conditions . . . 2 (c).

2. The new regulations and their subsequent amendments are set out in various government edicts. Notably, there is a series of Animal Gatherings Orders made under the 1981 Animal Health Act – plus Guidance Notes that support these Orders; also Rules for Livestock Movements.

3. Animal Gatherings (England) Order 2003 Guidance 1 (d) (1)

4. *The Guardian* April 14 2001, MAFF fails to meet slaughter targets

5. Porton Down is the country's leading warfare laboratory, where thousands of animals every year are subjected to lethal experiments in the name of national defence.

6. *The Guardian* May 15 2001, Ecoterrorists caused outbreak, says NFU chief

7. *The Guardian* June 29th 2003, Foot and Mouth farmer banned for fifteen years

8. *ibid*

9. DEFRA June 2002, Origins of the UK Foot and Mouth Disease Epidemic in 2001, p.8

10. *ibid* p.9

11. *ibid*

12. *The Guardian* March 14th 2003, Greedy farmers blamed for huge tax bill

13. *Farmers' Weekly* March 23rd 2001