

Protection of animals at the time of killing

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Pursuant to Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, the Commission presented a report on **systems restraining bovine animals by inversion or any unnatural position**.

To prepare this report the Commission commissioned a study (later called the "BoRest study"). Due to the specificity and the complexity of this study (in particular collecting technical and scientific data in slaughterhouses), its preparation and realisation took much more time than expected, hence a delay in adopting this report.

The issue: the report stated that in slaughterhouses, bovine animals are restrained in upright position in a restraining pen before being stunned, usually using a penetrating captive bolt.

Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 provides that the stunning requirements do not apply if slaughter is subject to particular methods prescribed by religious rites, provided that the slaughter takes place in a slaughterhouse.

Under these conditions, EU legislation exceptionally allows slaughter methods without stunning such as bleeding animals without prior stunning, which include ritual slaughter described by Jewish or Muslim rites. For that purpose, specific restraining systems have been designed to reverse the bovine animal upside down or on its side (rotating pen) in order to facilitate the cutting by the slaughterman. Such restraining systems may only be used if animals are slaughtered without stunning.

Restraining systems: the restraining system of bovine animals slaughtered without stunning is chosen by the slaughterhouse operators to meet the religious requirements of the communities concerned. In addition, the operators want a system that allows a quick loss of consciousness of the animals, ensures the work safety and is economically viable.

Two main restraining systems are used in the EU:

- the upright system where **animals are bled in upright position** (also used for stunning animals with a captive bolt);
- the rotating system where **animals are bled after being rotated in an inverted or lateral position** (only authorised for slaughter without stunning).

In 2012, in total 25 million bovine animals were slaughtered in the EU from which around 2.1 million (8.5%) were slaughtered without stunning, nearly all of them (97%) in six Member States.

From these 2.1 million animals, more than 1.6 million are slaughtered in a rotating device (78% of the animals slaughtered without stunning) while the rest (22%) are slaughtered in an upright device.

In 2012, rotating devices were not in use in Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and the UK. The upright position was mandatory in the UK.

The breakup between upright and rotating pen varies considerably between Member States from 100% upright (in the UK due to legislation) to 90% rotating (France), with various intermediate figures.

Animal welfare: the report noted that both systems have advantages and disadvantages.

The upright system was in the past considered more appropriate for the perspective of animal welfare because it does not put the animal in an unnatural position. Data collected on more than one thousand animals in the EU show that from an animal welfare point of view there is **no conclusive findings indicating that one system is better than the other.**

Due to the variety of the situations found in slaughterhouses, the animal welfare outcomes depend more on **the way devices are designed and used** than on the position of the animals (upright or inverted).

The same applies for the safety of the operators or the throughput of the slaughterline.

Investment and operating costs are substantially higher for rotating restraining systems than or upright ones (rotating restraining device cost EUR 12 600/year including the depreciation costs of an investment of EUR 100 000, maintenance and interest costs whereas the annual costs for an upright restraining device are estimated at about EUR 4 300 per year including the depreciation costs of an investment of EUR 50 000, maintenance and interest costs). The first ones are however widely used in the EU (80% of bovine animals slaughtered without stunning).

Based on these data, the BoRest study estimates that more than **85% of the animals are slaughtered with modern designed rotating device.**

Information on best practices and training for proper use of such restraining systems contributes to improved welfare of animals, independent of the restraining system used.