

## **Advice 08-2021 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on the meat inspection without incisions for young bovines, small ruminants and equids**

### **Background & Terms of reference**

Before the entry into force of Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627, the visual-only inspection (meat inspection without incisions) was already permitted for calves younger than 8 months and for fattening pigs on the basis of European Regulation (EC) 2074/2005. Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627 allows a visual-only inspection to be carried out for other animal species more specifically for young bovine animals aged minimum 8 months and maximum 20 months (if they had no access to pasture in an officially tuberculosis-free Member State or part of a Member State during their entire life), for sheep of which the permanent incisors have not yet erupted or which are less than 12 months old, for goats less than 6 months old and for solipeds.

The Scientific Committee is requested to answer the following questions:

- Is monitoring for specific zoonotic pathogens in live animals appropriate in the case of visual-only meat inspection? If so, which serological and/or microbiological monitoring is recommended?
- In the event that lesions or anomalies are observed during visual-only meat inspection at slaughter, which lesions should not automatically lead to post mortem inspection with incisions?
- If the lesions or anomalies are of such nature that post mortem inspection with incisions is not necessary, should the inspection be limited to the visual-only inspection as described in Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627 or should additional controls be carried out?

### **Method**

This risk assessment was carried out on the basis of expert opinion, data available in scientific literature and FASFC data on imports of slaughter animals (cattle, solipeds and small ruminants) and on observed abnormalities at slaughterhouse in these species in 2018 and 2019.

### **Conclusions**

The Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the replacement of a classical meat inspection by a visual-only inspection for young bovine animals, small ruminants and solipeds, which are kept under the conditions mentioned in Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627, is justified from a food safety point of view. The disadvantage of a slightly less sensitive detection of lesions during meat inspection does not outweigh the advantage of reduced cross-contamination at the slaughter line. It is emphasised that a properly conducted meat inspection is and will remain an important instrument in monitoring animal and public health and in detecting newly emerging (epidemic) animal diseases. However, the Committee is of the opinion that these objectives can also be achieved with a visual-only meat inspection. Furthermore, the Scientific Committee is of the opinion that a full meat inspection (with incisions) should always be carried out when lesions are detected during the visual inspection, even if they are small. After all, it is impossible to infer the seriousness of the hazard to public and animal health from the size of a lesion. Furthermore, meat inspection remains an essential component in the surveillance of animal and public health and in the detection of epidemic diseases and it is therefore important to pay due attention to all abnormalities. The Scientific Committee therefore recommends that a full meat inspection (with incisions) should always be carried out when abnormalities are observed during visual meat inspection.

Based on a study on the prevalence of zoonoses in solipeds and small ruminants, the Scientific Committee believes that a monitoring of zoonoses should not be organised in live solipeds and small ruminants in case of visual-only meat inspection. In young cattle, it is recommended to set up a monitoring programme for bovine tuberculosis and cysticercosis in the context of the introduction of visual-only meat inspection. For bovine tuberculosis, the Committee recommends that the surveillance programme already in place should be regularly reviewed and adjusted if necessary, to ensure maximum detection in live animals. For cysticercosis, it is recommended to consider the use of Ag-ELISA on blood samples to increase the sensitivity of the surveillance programme. However, it is noted that the introduction of this test due to its higher sensitivity in the initial phase of implementation will lead to economic losses in terms of the value of cattle carcasses.

Furthermore, the Scientific Committee has evaluated the content of the circular letters regarding the practical modalities for the already existing visual-only inspection of veal calves and pigs and has formulated some recommendations for improvement.

Finally, the Committee also makes some recommendations concerning the exchange of information between different actors, the follow-up of meat inspection results and traceability. For example, a flow of information regarding the detection and treatment of zoonotic diseases from human medicine to veterinary medicine (and vice versa) and from slaughterhouses to farmers is paramount in the fight against many diseases/zoonoses. Furthermore, it is of great importance that the results of any diagnostic test on slaughter animals and on other animals of the same herd of origin are made available to the inspectors at the slaughterhouse via the food chain information system. The Scientific Committee also recommends that the reasons for rejection be better specified and mentioned in the databases. In addition, the FASFC is advised to study the meat inspection results on a regular basis and to compare the future results of the visual inspection with the results of the full inspection with incisions and palpations. Finally, the Committee has found that cattle which are imported by a Belgian trader and slaughtered only after a short stay in Belgium are not always recorded as imported in the FASFC databases. It is recommended that this lack of traceability be eliminated.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french.