

Status on ritual slaughtering in Denmark and Sweden

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1. Introduction

The current legal status with regard to ritual slaughtering in Denmark and Sweden are basically the same – in neither country is this practice allowed without prior stunning. However, as the legal requirements of ritual slaughtering in Denmark has relatively recently changed, it is most relevant to reflect on the societal aspects associated with the legal evolution on this issue in Denmark. Therefore, most emphasis will be put on the situation there.

2. Denmark

2.1. Current legislation and practice

The legal framework of the current practice with regards to ritual slaughtering is defined in Order #135 of 14 February 2014 issued by the competent Danish authority - the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (= "Fødevarestyrelsen"). The Order implements the EU regulation on slaughter in general and contains separate sections that stipulate a number of specific Danish requirements on ritual slaughtering of cattle, sheep, goats and chicken.

Ritual slaughter is allowed provided that the animals are anaesthetized (stunned) prior to the slaughtering. Furthermore, ritual slaughtering may only take place at an authorized slaughterhouse. Slaughterhouses that wish to embark on ritual slaughter with prior stunning must in advance report this to the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration. It is a requirement that animals slaughtered in a ritual manner are (at least in part) *expected* by the producer to have end consumers that requests such practices. But there is no requirement that ritually slaughtered animal products must only be sold on markets or to consumers that demands halal (kosher is not possible given the requirement of stunning).

For cattle, sheep and goats above 8 months of age¹, the stunning may be performed by a non-penetrating stunner (cash knocker). Rapid intervention with electric stunning or a penetrating stunner is mandated if the cash knocker fails. Cattle must be stunned in a suitable box. In practice, the cash knocker is widely used.

Chicken are stunned in electrical baths. The slaughterhouse must ensure that batches of chicken are of uniform size, that conductivity is enhanced by e.g. salt addition, and that the chicken are bled maximum 5 seconds after leaving the electric bath.

It is allowed to *import* meat originating from animals ritually slaughtered *without* prior stunning. Such import is practiced.

There is no official, available statistics for the frequency of halal slaughtering in Denmark. However, the industry (The Danish Agriculture and Food Council) estimates that ~99% of all chicken are slaughtered in this manner. In cattle, the demand for ritually-slaughtered meat (for export) has been increasing with presently ~50% of Danish cattle being estimated slaughtered under halal rituals.

The Muslim population in Denmark is ~280.000.

2.2. Public debate and perception

The legal requirement for stunning prior to ritual slaughter is relatively new in Denmark and firstly came about with the aforementioned Order from 2014. Before that, ritual slaughter without prior stunning was legal if performed in a slaughterhouse.

The change in legislation in 2014 was purely politically motivated. It followed a very heated public and political debate in the summer of 2013 - the Danes called it "the meat-ball war". The political debate had very little resonance or relevance in real life as the practice of ritual slaughter *without* stunning was *not* in use at the time – and had not been so 10 years prior to 2014.

The Muslim and Jewish societies in Denmark both responded negatively to the change in legislation, expressing their views in news entries and by providing material and documentation to the Danish minister of Food on the animal welfare of ritual slaughtering without prior stunning. Most vocal in their resistance were the Jewish population, as the new Order prevented a (possible) future production of Danish kosher meat. But their concerns did not prompt the political system to change its views; nor did this situation escalate to "principal" law suits being filed by any concerned religious minority.

However, the news story of the novel Danish legislation mandating stunning in halal slaughter was picked-up broadly by several Middle-east news channels including Al Arabiya and Al-Jazeera. In their coverage, both news organizations presented a marked negative angle on Denmark and Danish Muslim views. This was particularly

¹ For bulls above 24 months cash knocker is prohibited.

worrying, as Denmark had then only just recently recovered after major set-back in Muslim country and export relations after a major crisis that started in 2005².

Therefore, several Danish embassies had to allocate substantial resources to damage control in the weeks ensuring the public and political debate and legislative change. This activity fortunately apparently managed to mitigate adverse effects on Danish exports.

Finally, it is relevant to examine the medium-term discussions and effects of the new Danish legislation in the period from 2014 to now.

In the national, public context, the issue of ritual slaughter was quickly replaced with other apparently more pressing debates. News archives 2015-2017 contain only few articles or entries on ritual slaughter – mostly dealing with extreme right-wing views surfacing from the social media on how wrong it is for the general public to not being able to actively avoid halal slaughtered meat. A halal-label demand has however not emerged as a tangible political issue since 2014. A resurgence of the “meat-ball crisis” actually *did* emerge in 2016, this time round however not on the slaughter process, but on the daily menu in kindergartens etc. – expressing political demands in a few Danish municipalities of securing or mandating pork servings to the youngsters.

It *could* be feared that the change in legislation in 2014 would result in an increase in the frequency of illegal ritual slaughtering – i.e. that “dubious characters” would see an emerging “business opportunity”. The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration actually *have* experienced some problems in this field since 2014, even though the number of cases is very low (~ 5 cases the past 10 years); too few cases to present any meaningful trend. Most cases appear to be small sheep farms where a few sheep are slaughtered without stunning.

One particular case is worth mentioning as it somewhat related to the change in legislation in Denmark. A Danish-based company (found with several illegal and severe breaches in hygiene etc.) had a practice of importing whole carcasses from Poland where these animals were halal slaughtered without stunning. The company had, according to the Danish authorities, a rather unpleasant and threatening practice in their marketing their products to local halal butcher shops in the greater Copenhagen area – with the religious claim only that their products were “truly” halal. Fortunately this view has had relatively little resonance among leading Danish Muslim spokespersons, not generally opposing stunning at slaughter.

² Following a Danish news magazine’s publication of several critical and satirical drawings of the prophet Mohammad.

3. Sweden

3.1. Current legislation and practice

Mandating stunning prior to slaughter has a very long history in Sweden. This requirement first emerged in Swedish Law 1937:313 (= from 1937); from 1944 included in the Swedish law on animal welfare (Law 1944:219).

The legal requirements of the current slaughter practice is defined e.g. in Orders 2012:27, Case L22 (implementing the EU regulation) and in Instructions on animal welfare at slaughter, latest edition on 27 June 2016; both issued by the competent Swedish authority - the Swedish Board of Agriculture (= "Jordbruksverket"). No particular sections deals with ritual slaughter as this type of slaughter is seen as any other, but the authority's homepage holds a separate section dealing with the issue. All staff involved in slaughtering must possess a particular education which also is the case for the Muslim staff involved in halal slaughter.

The methods for stunning in ritual slaughter are the same as in Denmark, i.e. stunners for cattle and sheep and electricity for chicken. Sheep may also be stunned using electricity. Use of a fixation box is possible.

Import of halal and kosher products is also practiced in Sweden. But according to Muslim experts, the vast majority of Swedish Muslims consume Swedish-produced halal meat (where the animals have been stunned prior to the kill).

Swedish producers of poultry and beef do not disclose the number of animals slaughtered according to halal requirements. The biggest national poultry provider ("Kronfågel") claims on their homepage not to produce halal slaughtered chicken at all. On request from the author of this memo, the largest beef producer ("Scan") also refuses to perform any halal slaughtering. A smaller specialized halal-based company (Qibbla Halal Kött AB) on the other hand claims that their animals are killed exploiting Scan's slaughter facilities.

The Muslim population is ~500.000 in Sweden.

3.2. Public debate and perception

The Swedish media occasionally reflects a debate over halal or kosher. In the media databases is in general found 1-3 relatively smaller stories per year. These address cases of illegal halal slaughter (in small sheep farms), the increasing market for halal products due to the increase in Muslim population, or the marketing of right-wing views identical to the ones mentioned above for Denmark.

The biggest media story on this issue over the last year (2016) dealt with transportation of live cattle from certain EU Member States (Sweden *not* included) intended for halal slaughter in Turkey.

No current or previous records on any “principal” lawsuits filed by religious minorities could be found at the authorities or in media databases.

4. Sources of information

Homepage (Danish) of the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration: www.foedevarestyrelsen.dk

Personal communication with staff members in Danish Veterinary and Food Administration

Homepage (Danish) of the Danish Agriculture and Food Council: www.lf.dk

Personal communication with staff members in the Danish Agriculture and Food Council

News archives of major Danish news organizations: DR, Berlingske, Ekstra Bladet

Homepage (Swedish) of the Swedish Agricultural Board: www.jordbrugsverket.se

Swedish meat and poultry sector homepages (Swedish) : www.svenskkott.se, www.svenskfagel.se, www.kronfagel.se

Personal communication with Scan AB’s customer service.

News archives (Swedish) of major Swedish news organizations: SVT, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen