

Pressure on local abattoirs puts businesses at risk

Britain's local abattoir network continues to struggle under the pressure of red tape, staff shortages and compliance costs. **Jonathan Riley** reports

More than half of the 62 local abattoir owners could quit in the next five years unless there is a change in government policy, research by the National Craft Butchers organisation shows.

The research paints a concerning picture of an ageing workforce without a solid succession plan. The majority of owners – seven in 10 – were aged over 51, with 11% still beyond the normal retirement age, compared with half (56%) of younger owners.

on-farm processing to add value.

The local community benefits in turn, with jobs for skilled workers either at the facility itself or in butchers or other retail outlets, Mr Perry says.

Shorter distances between farms and abattoirs mean reduced food miles, while local processing can also



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have hit the supply chain in local abattoirs. Brexit policies had failed to recognise the skill and high level of training needed in the sector. Abattoir workers are not included on the government's priority Shortage Occupation List and the flow of overseas labour into the sector has fallen.

Restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic have added to the difficulties.

But the work itself was a further barrier to attracting younger workers.

MOBILE ABATTOIR NETWORK MAKING PROGRESS

Plans to produce a network of mobile abattoirs are progressing, with operational testing and assessment for a first unit under way.

Plans had been produced in 2019 for a specially converted unit in a 7.5m-long lorry trailer, with construction due to start in early 2020. Then Covid-19 hit. However, the team behind the scheme have since switched to a manufactured mobile unit brought in from Italy.

Independent consultant Jane Guise is acting as adviser for the project and

has helped facilitate the purchase from Sicily-based manufacturer Cogemat. The unit is about the same size as a shipping container at about 12m long, Dr Guise says.

Essential experience

"Cogemat's experience was essential for us at this stage of the plan. We still intend to develop our own unit, but this will be two to three years away," says Dr Guise.

The project, funded by the EU Rural Development Programme, is

now undergoing final processing approval by the FSA, he says. First tests with sheep have been successfully completed, but negotiating the strict rules and licensing procedure will take many months.

Once the project is up and running, the facility will be trailer mounted and pulled by a Fastrac, travelling to farms in a 30- to 50-mile radius.

All classes of livestock will be handled and the likely scenario is for the unit to visit flocks and herds supplying high-end, artisan butchers and farm shops.