



Meat scam report details health risk

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A FARMER caught operating an illegal slaughterhouse at his remote steading in the north-east of Scotland was just one link in a highly-organised criminal network that posed a risk to public health, according to a new report.

Julian Jones, 41, was jailed for six months at Elgin Sheriff Court in February after he was arrested for his part in an illegal operation to supply outlawed sheep smokies - a Caribbean and West African delicacy - to ethnic communities throughout England.

Jones, the first person in Scotland to be prosecuted in a case involving the illegal slaughter of animals for food, was caught when police and environmental health officers swooped on his slaughterhouse at Backies Farm, Deskford, near Cullen.

The officers found the carcasses of 62 sheep that had been slaughtered by having their throats slit and left to bleed to death in a filthy, faeces-strewn barn. Most of the animals had not been stunned before having their throats slit.

Another 39 live and shorn sheep were found at the steading awaiting their fate.

Jones admitted five food safety and animal welfare offences, including slaughtering sheep without a licence, preparing carcasses for human consumption in dirty and unhygienic conditions and preparing for sale sheep carcasses, offal and heads which were unfit for consumption.

A detailed report on the groundbreaking prosecution, to go before Moray councillors tomorrow, reveals that Jones was part of a booming clandestine trade in illegal meat, run by a network of closely linked gangs.

The report by Donnie Mackay, the environmental health manager for Moray, discloses that some of the carcasses contained parts of the spinal cord and spleen, material that should be removed as part of the government's drive to prevent the risk of BSE-type infections in livestock.

Mr Mackay states in his report: "It was decided to devote significant staff resources to bring this matter to court as there were considerable risks to public health and the agricultural and food industries.

"The unsatisfactory unhygienic conditions associated with the slaughter, preparation and transportation of the smokies exposed the meat to the risk of contamination which may be capable of causing diseases such as E Coli 0157, salmonellosis and cryptosporidiosis.

"The carcasses also contained specified risk material - spinal cord and spleen. Sheep heads were also supplied to the public and they, too, are specified risk material."

Mr Mackay continues: "Julian Jones is just one link in a meat scam supplying illegally slaughtered sheep as smokies.

"It is hoped that the imposition of a custodial sentence will serve as a warning to criminals involved in meat scams and have repercussions for the national situation in relation to meat crime."

Jones, who is originally from Wales, had a series of previous convictions for animal welfare and food safety offences in England and Wales.

In 1999 he was banned for life from having custody of any animal by a Welsh court and branded Britain's "cruellest farmer" after council officials and a veterinarian found a pack of dogs feeding on maggot-infested carcasses on his farm near Cardigan.

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