

# Illegal meat racketeers exposed in TV documentary

Hugh Muir

Monday September 20, 2004

## The Guardian

The safety of Britain's food chain has again been questioned after an undercover television investigation found meat traders selling carcasses judged "unfit for dogs".

Reporters from Channel 4 also interviewed an independent meat consultant, who advised them on how to get potentially dangerous meat onto the market.

The most graphic abuses involve the sale of sheep carcasses by a London trader, who was last month convicted on charges of keeping meat in unhygienic conditions.

According to a Dispatches investigation to be screened tonight, the trader sold up to 40 carcasses, which were emaciated and infected with diseases such as tapeworm, from the back of vans.

The programme shows that the trader also supplied suspect meat to butchers' shops and restaurants.

An examination by experts for the programme found both fit and unfit meat on sale. Each carcass should carry a clearly discernible health mark to allow the meat's origins to be traced, but the markings were often smudged and unreadable.

A raid on the trader's premises found carcasses stored on the floor with boxes of poultry loaded on top.

The trader was also taped discussing his involvement in the supply of "smokies" - sheep carcasses illegally slaughtered and prepared for the ethnic market. The carcasses are flamed using high-powered blowtorches.

Asked about his ability to obtain the illicit delicacy, he said: "We can't get it that easily. Those health people are watching everywhere in London. If you get caught it is a £20,000 fine. We used to get 600 to 700 a week."

It is estimated that the profit from one van load of smokies can be as high as £6,000.

Perhaps more disturbing are the allegations related to the industry consultant, who is seen helping Channel 4's bogus meat traders avoid the safety regime established in the wake of the BSE and foot and mouth scandals.

The consultant used to be responsible for training meat workers, but has since been suspended. He is under investigation for failing to carry out proper training.

During taped exchanges, he tells undercover reporters that the system of grant aid from the government is so lax that he regularly claims double the fee he is entitled to.

When the reporters say one of their van drivers needs a Basic Food Hygiene certificate, he is filmed giving them a booklet containing all the answers to the relevant examination.

During the test they deliberately fail to answer all of the multiple choice questions and get some answers wrong. "It's all right," he tells them afterwards. "It has been sorted."

When asked for his advice about handling questionable produce, he says: "You get that out of the door like greased lightning. It goes in and it goes out. In and out. It is as simple as that."

Yunes Teinez, a senior environmental health officer in Haringey in north London and one of the officials who has been investigating the trader's activities, said illegal meat racketeers seemed to have the upper hand. "You try to do your best to stop the unfit meat entering the food chain but you find a lot of obstacles," he said.

"Environmental health officers need help and resources. This is a growing problem because many local councils don't take any action to tackle illegal meat at all."

A Food Standards Agency spokesman said it had not seen the programme, but added: "The FSA takes the issue of illegal meat extremely seriously and is assisting local authorities in their efforts to clamp down on illegal meat scams."

• Dispatches: The Dirty Meat Scandal, Channel Four, Monday 20th September, 8pm.