

MEAT CRIMES IN THE UK

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Ladies and Gentlemen: it is an honour and a highlight of my career to be invited, to talk to such an eminent audience. I would like to give you an overview of the present situation of Meat Crimes in the UK.



Ladies and gentlemen

You must have read the newspaper reports and seen the pictures of unfit meat and poultry on your TV screens concerning a large scale operations involving the diversion of unfit meat into the human food chain. It was such an organised illegal enterprise that I would be surprised if some of you have not eaten that meat.

After arms and narcotics the trade in illegal meat is considered to be the third biggest illegal trade, estimated to be worth up to £1bn a year. Meat crimes threaten public health, violate people's religious belief and abuse their trust. It frequently involves cruelty to animals. The people who carry them out have no moral qualms even about potentially infecting the public with new variant CJD.

The trade is potentially international - but enforcement efforts so far have been hampered by a shortage of resources and lack of coordinated intelligence between the agencies involved.

Penalties available under food law are also inadequate to deter some persistent offenders who in simple terms, can afford to pay the fines as overhead costs and are very good in exploiting the loop holes.

The largest public health enforcement operation in recent years, Operation Fox, which was co-ordinated by Rotherham MDC, is also likely to have import ramifications for enforcement. Recycling up to a 1,000 tonnes of unfit poultry into the food chain in December 2000.



Environmental Health Officers who raided the plant were appalled to find rotting poultry in overflowing skips, destined for people's dinner tables.

An Amber-Valley DC operation into a similar pet food laundering crime led to an equally high profile Court Case.

The complex food fraud dating back to 1995, involving an estimated 459 tonnes of rancid and unfit poultry, which was diverted into the food chain, in some cases finding its way onto the shelves of high street supermarkets.

More than a million putrid and diseased chicken and turkey carcasses into the food chain between January 2000 and March 2001.

There was evidence that, in addition to low risk waste passing through the company, high risk waste – deemed unfit even for pet food – was being trimmed and repackaged to make it appear fit for sale as fillet or for ready-to-eat meals

The food trade and food enforcers collectively cannot be proud of the series of failures that allowed meat not even suitable for pet food to find its way into national food distribution.

Regulation of meat issues is extremely complex, with a large number of agencies involved, and it is too easy for criminals to exploit the gaps. As things stand, the potentially huge financial rewards far outweigh the risks of being caught.

What is the problem?

1. IMPORTED MEAT

Illegally Imported Products

Bush Meat - Antelope, Grass cutters (bush rats), bats, wild boar, primates (gorillas and monkeys), live crabs, Giant snails, Wally meat and Poultry.

- Dried and smoked meat of all kinds
- Snails
- Goat Meat
- Dried and smoked fish and shellfish

Methods of Smuggling

- Commercial/Dispensed Smuggling
- Passenger Baggage
- Personal Imports
- In Personal Effects
- Concealed with Fruit/Vegetables
- Consignments via airports
- Concealed with other food stuffs in shipping containers
- Via other EU Member States
- Trucks
- Caravans
- Mail

2. **ILLEGAL MEAT**

- Diversion of unfit meat from pet food trade to human food chain
- Illegal slaughter:
- Mutton, Beef ,Cattle/feet, Smokies and Poultry
 - Unlicensed Cutting Plants
 - Unlicensed Cold Stores
 - Sale of non-Health Marked Meat
 - Use of 'Illegal Health Marks'
 - Licensed Plants
 - Legal meat becoming unfit due to poor transport and storage
 - Sale and handling of 'Condemned Meat'

- Freezing out-of-date meat and re-dating
- Misdescription
- Frozen meat thawed out and sold as 'Fresh'
- Mutton dressed as goat
- Non –Halal (Haram) meat sold as Halal

Responsibility for enforcing the legislation falls upon the Meat Hygiene Service, which is an executive agency of the Food Standards Agency, in licensed premises; in non-licensed premises local authorities enforce the legislation.

However, many local authorities are not equipped to deal with this public health issue. Responsibility for enforcing relevant legislation used to be the duty of local authorities.

Since 1995 the responsibility for meat inspections was passed to the Meat Hygiene Service, and responsibility to enforce the same legislation was partly transferred to local authorities in the year 2000 under the Enhanced Powers Regulations.

The skills, the resources, and expertise of local authorities had been gradually eroded but they are now generally waking up to their responsibilities.

However, their enforcements in this field appear to be patchy.

In the London Borough of Haringey I have been enforcing the relevant law rigorously and vigorously single handedly. I wish I could show you some pictures of the sample of meat I have seized over the years. I thought about bringing some with me, but I didn't want to spoil your lunch!

After three hard working years I am moving on from Haringey to the London Borough of Hackney next month, leaving Haringey free from unfit meat. I am sure my colleagues will keep up the high standards and continue to protect public health in Haringey.

The government departments like, DEFRA and the FSA, under pressure from consumers, have also introduced some measures to combat the trade.

The Food Standards Agency has, on the recommendations of the Waste Food Task Force already introduced staining of high-risk poultry waste to prevent it entering into the human food chain. An Illegal Meat Task Force has also been set up to help Environmental Health Officers combat large-scale food frauds.

I am sure our colleagues in the Food Standards Agency will continue to introduce more suitable measures to curb this rotten trade but I would urge your good selves to use your recognised status to bring about changes to enable my colleagues within the profession to protect public health in a more effective manner.

Thank you very much.