**MANDATORY SHEEP CARCASE CLASSIFICATION & PRICE REPORTING AND AUTOMATED CARCASE CLASSIFICATION**

**CONSULTATION**

**FEBRUARY 2024**

**CONTENTS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Page |
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Background | 4 |
| 3. Implementation | 7 |
| 4. Consultation Questions | 8 |
| 5. Equality and Rural Considerations | 28 |
| 6. How to respond and when | 29 |
| 7. List of Consultees | 30 |

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Department for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (‘the Department’) carried out a public consultation exercise between November 2021 and January 2022 seeking views on the desirability and practical implications of a mandatory approach to sheep carcase classification and price reporting arrangements. Having considered these responses, the then Minister gave instruction to introduce mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting in Northern Ireland.

1.2 This consultation exercise however did not seek views on the authorisation process for automated carcase classification. This consultation therefore seeks views on this aspect as well as seeking to confirm key features of a mandatory sheep carcase classification system. Given that this is a specialised area, this consultation is targeted at those stakeholders considered by the Department as likely to have pertinent views on the matter i.e. those key stakeholders interested in the production, slaughter, processing and sale of lamb. As any changes regarding automated carcase classification will also impact beef classification, key stakeholders in this area are also included.

1.3 This document sets out proposed changes to current legislation regarding the authorisation process for automated carcase classification for sheep and beef. The current requirements are set out in Retained EU Legislation and are considered to be no longer fit for purpose as they fail to account for the post-EU status of the United Kingdom.

1.4 Responses to this consultation will inform the formulation of recommendations on the introduction of mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting, and the authorisation of automated carcase classification for beef and sheep to an incoming DAERA Minister. **The introduction of mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting and the authorisation of automated carcase classification for beef and sheep will be matters for an incoming DAERA Minister and NI Assembly.**

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 In Northern Ireland, it is mandatory to classify beef and pig carcases in terms of conformation (shape) and fat content quality and for market prices to be reported to the Department. These prices can be used to analyse market trends, provide transparency to the industry, and compare average prices across regions.

2.2 In November 2021, the Department launched a public consultation on the possibility of introducing a mandatory system for sheep carcase classification and price reporting. The 2021 consultation sought views on the following:

a. Whether respondents supported introduction of mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting in Northern Ireland

 Two out of three respondents supported the introduction of such a system.

b. Whether respondents would want to continue using the (S)EUROP system under a mandatory setup

 All three respondents supported this.

c. Regarding how much to align with GB, the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the EU

 All three respondents wanted NI to align with both GB and ROI (and the wider EU) as much as possible.

d. Whether they agreed to the proposed exemption for abattoirs with a throughput of fewer than 1,000 sheep per week as an annual average

 Two out of three respondents supported this. The other had no comment.

e. Whether enforcement procedures in a mandatory system should be similar to those for existing pig and beef mandatory systems

 Two out of three respondents supported this. The other had no comment.

f. Whether the proposal would have any impact on, or represent any opportunities to improve on, equality for any Section 75 categories, and whether there would be any negative rural or economic impacts

 Two out of three respondents saw no such negative impacts. The other had no comment.

g. Whether the proposal would impact the respondents. their businesses or organisations

 Two respondents stated that, while their members would be impacted, it was still their preference for mandatory carcase classification and price reporting to be introduced in order to protect sheep producers. The other had no comment.

2.3 After considering the responses to this consultation and liaising with the governments of the rest of the UK, the then Minister instructed officials to pursue the introduction of mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting. Based on this instruction, the 2021 consultation responses and further discussion amongst officials and colleagues within Defra and Scottish and Welsh governments, DAERA officials are pursuing introducing a mandatory system for sheep which would:

* utilise the (S)EUROP system;
* seek to align with GB and the EU as much as possible;
* exempt abattoirs from carcase classification and price reporting with a throughput of fewer than 1,000 sheep per week as an annual average (abattoirs slaughtering less than the threshold that wish to voluntarily apply the mandatory classification system would be required to meet the requirements of the (S)EUROP system, though they would not be required to report prices); and
* mirror enforcement procedures used for pig and beef carcase classification and price reporting.

2.4 This public consultation did not however seek views on how automated carcase classification for sheep might be authorised. Rules for authorising automated carcase classification for sheep and beef are currently contained in Retained EU Legislation 2017/1182 Article 10 and Annex IV. However, these measures do not take account of the UK’s position outside the EU. It is therefore necessary to seek views from key stakeholders on new legislation regarding authorisation of any automated carcase classification machinery. The proposals in this document to this effect are largely in line with previous practice for automated beef carcase classification under the EU legislation but adapted to reflect the UK’s current position outside the EU.

2.5 The consultation did not establish stakeholder views on other essential elements of a mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting system including particular details on licensing, weighing, reporting and publication. This consultation seeks to address this.

2.6 The Department intends to work closely with the governments of the other UK regions on this matter. England’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Welsh government are therefore launching a joint-consultation on this matter and Scottish government is launching a similar consultation. Responses to each of these consultations will be considered on a UK-wide basis with the intention that each administration’s legislation could have a clause recognising authorisations in the other administrations across the UK. This of course, is pending on Ministerial decisions and the different legislative processes across the UK.

2.7 The Department, in line with the rest of the UK, does not intend to make price reporting for liveweight sheep mandatory at this time. It is the Department’s view that this can continue on a voluntary basis.

**3. IMPLEMENTATION**

 3.1 The Department proposes to introduce new legislation which will bring the following into Northern Ireland:

 a) mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting; and

b) a process for authorising automated carcase classification for beef and sheep.

The powers to do so come from Part 4 of Schedule 6 of The Agriculture Act 2020. Note that this provision will need to be commenced prior to such legislation being introduced. We also propose to draw upon elements of the retained legislation in their drafting.

3.2 The authorisation process for automated carcase classification would need to follow the following key principles. These do not differ significantly from what was implemented for automated beef carcase classification under EU legislation:

* Government set the standard of carcase classification;
* Automated grading methods should meet agreed UK-wide standards set by Defra and the Devolved Administrations regarding accuracy, repeatability and security;
* Government must authorise and license automated grading methods to ensure that manual, semi-automated and automated classifications all meet these standards consistently. Post authorisation, each administration will be responsible for governing the standards in their jurisdiction; and
* Recognition of authorisation should be mutual between all four administrations to provide UK wide authorisation.

3.3 For an initial period of one year, it *may* be necessary for carcase classification to be carried out manually by licenced classifiers to provide the data required to test and authorise automated sheep grading methods. We are proposing that following the required period, carcase classification could be undertaken using appropriately licenced manual or authorised automated methods.

**4. CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

**Confidentiality**

4.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, the Department in this case. This includes information provided in response to this consultation.

4.2 The Department will publish a synopsis of responses to the consultation. This will include a list of names of organisations that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details.

4.3 The Department cannot automatically consider information supplied to it in response to a consultation to be confidential. However, it does have a responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to a consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response. Please be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, except in very particular circumstances.

4.4 Should you respond in an individual capacity: the Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. This means that your personal information will not be disclosed to third parties should you request confidentiality.

4.5 Consultation responses may be shared with Defra, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government, each of whom will handle the data according to their individual privacy policies and in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. Each administration’s privacy notice may be found at:

* For Defra: [Privacy notice: how we use your personal information - GOV.UK (defra.gov.uk)](https://your-defra-account.defra.gov.uk/privacy-notice)
* For the Scottish Government: [Privacy - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/privacy/)
* For the Welsh Government: [Welsh Government privacy notice | GOV.WALES](https://www.gov.wales/welsh-government-privacy-notice)

4.6 There may be occasions when the Department will share the information you provide in response to the consultation with external analysts, including any personal data. This is for the purposes of consultation response analysis and provision of a report of the summary of responses only.

4.7 For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioners Office (see its website at <https://ico.org.uk/>).

***Question 1: Would you like anything in your response to be kept confidential?***

*Yes / No*

**About you**

***Question 2: Are you, or do you represent:***

* *a livestock farmer*
* *a livestock market*
* *an abattoir*
* *a cutting plant not connected to an abattoir*
* *a trader in livestock or meat*
* *a retailer*
* *a manufacturer of automated grading equipment*
* *other (please specify)*

***Question 3: Please provide the name of the business or organisation that you represent***

***Question 4: Please indicate where your business/organisation is predominately located:***

* *England* [ ]
* *Wales* [ ]
* *Scotland* [ ]
* *Northern Ireland* [ ]
* *Other (please specify) ……………………*

***Question 5: If you represent an abattoir(s), please indicate the number of premises you have in each country?***

* *England …………………*
* *Wales …………………*
* *Scotland …………………*
* *Northern Ireland* *…………………*
* *Other (please specify)* *…………………*

***Question 6: If you represent an abattoir/s, what was your average weekly throughput during the previous 12 months:***

* *For lambs aged less than 12 months: …………………*
* *For adult cattle (aged 8 months or more): …………………*

**Licensing**

Proposal 1

4.8 Testing and licensing requirements will apply to all sheep grading techniques including automated and manual. This will be similar to the existing licensing requirements for classifiers of beef carcases. Manual carcase classification, where required under the legislation, must be carried out by qualified persons. These persons will be required to undergo an assessment.

4.9 Authorised automated grading methods will require licencing for use at a specific site. The assessment, and the granting of any subsequent licence, will be carried out by DAERA.

4.10 Conditions may be imposed on any licences granted, as with existing beef carcase classifier licences. Where a licence has been issued, it is intended the following will apply:

* A licence or any condition can be varied;
* A licence can be revoked when a significant number of incorrect classifications, presentations or identifications take place;
* A licence can be suspended or revoked if the person has broken the terms or conditions of the licence or where it is no longer appropriate for the licence holder to carry out classifications; and
* A licence can be suspended or revoked if the automated grading equipment no longer meets the standards required, whether this is due to the equipment, the operator’s use of the equipment or the presentation of the carcases being classified.

***Question 7: Do you agree or disagree with proposal 1 (set out above) for the licencing of carcase classifiers?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

***Question 8: Do you employ people that will require a licence under a mandatory sheep scheme******to classify sheep carcases?***

*Yes / No / Not applicable*

***Question 9: – If yes, how many people will require a license?***

*1-2* [ ]

*3-5* [ ]

*6-10* [ ]

*Greater than 10* [ ]

**Carcase presentation, weighing and coefficients**

**Carcase presentation**

Proposal 2

4.11 That in Northern Ireland, the only acceptable specification will be the existing EU specification – that is, the carcase is presented without the head (severed at the atlantooccipital joint), the feet (severed at the carpometacarpal or tarso-metatarsal joints), the tail (severed between the sixth and seventh caudal vertebrae), the udder/cod fat, the genitalia, the liver, and the pluck.

4.12 When comparing sheep carcases classified in NI to those classified in England, Scotland and Wales, a coefficient will be used if these are classified to a different specification.

4.13 No other presentations will be permitted before carcase classification. However, abattoirs and processors can customise dressing specifications after the carcase has been classified, weighed and price reported as mandated by the scheme. This will ensure there is consistency in carcase specification at the points of weighing and classification, which will improve transparency and fairness.

***Question 10: Do you agree or disagree with proposal 2 (above) which sets out the carcase presentations to be used at classification?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

### Weighing the carcase and the hot to cold weight coefficient

Proposal 3

4.14 We propose to legislate that the weight of the carcase must be accurate and unrounded (recorded to 0.1kg as per weigh scale readout). The carcase weight upon which the market price will be reported will be its cold weight. The carcase must be weighed within 60 minutes of the animal being stuck (producing the “warm weight”). A deduction of 2% (the warm to cold coefficient) is then applied to the warm weight. This takes into account weight loss on chilling after slaughter and produces the cold weight.

***Question 11: Do you agree or disagree that weights should be recorded unrounded?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

***Question 12: Do you agree or disagree with the application of a 2% warm to cold weight coefficient?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

**Reporting of classification grades and prices**

Proposal 4

4.15 Abattoirs will be required to provide to a supplier (whoever has sent the animal to slaughter) the following details for each individual sheep: date of slaughter, dressing specification, carcase category, weight, conformation class, fat class, price and kill number. These details on sheep, less than 12 months old at slaughter, that are purchased from suppliers on a deadweight basis must be reported to the Department. This will be used for market monitoring and publication purposes.

4.16 Information shared with government should be in a usable and understandable format. As most commercial businesses now have access to digital technology and this would be a requirement on the larger of these abattoir businesses, we propose this data is reported in an approved digital format.

4.17 For cattle, under the existing scheme, this includes any bonuses for elements such as specific breeds, farm assurance, supply and organic. It is proposed that the same approach should apply for sheep.

4.18 This would provide for a more open sheep market and increase the information available to producers who sell sheep to abattoirs on a deadweight basis.

***Question 13: Do you agree or disagree with Proposal 4 (above) on information reporting?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

***Question 14: Do you agree or disagree that abattoirs should be required to complete their data and price reporting to government using an electronic format?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

***Question 15: If your business will be required under these proposals to report pricing information in an electronic format, can you already meet this requirement?***

*Yes / No / Don’t Know*

*If you answered ‘No’, please could you provide a reason why this might not be possible?*

***Question 16: If you need to make changes to your systems to enable you to report prices electronically- please estimate how much this will cost and details of what you will need to do?***

**Data Publication**

**Publication**

Proposal 5

4.19 We propose that data collected on sheep carcase grades and pricing information will be published. This will be in an aggregated format to preserve commercial confidentiality.

***Question 17: Do you agree or disagree with Proposal 5 (above) on the publication of data?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

**Weight band alignment**

4.20 Under current voluntary reporting, England, Scotland and Wales publish prices per kg for all lambs within the Standard Quality Quotation (SQQ) weight band for the carcase of dressed prime sheep weighing between 12kg and 21.5kg. It is however possible that GB may decide to report prices on all sheep aged 12 months and less regardless of weight once a mandatory system is brought in. Northern Ireland currently publishes for a weight band between 16kg and 23.5kg. Bringing in a mandatory system would provide an opportunity to align with the rest of the UK on this point.

***Question 18: Would you prefer that collated price data in NI be published on the same basis as is decided for GB?***

* *Yes, align with whichever decision is made for GB* [ ]
* *Only align if GB decides to publish within the SQQ weight band* [ ]
* *Only align if GB decides to publish all sheep 12 months or younger* [ ]
* *No, continue to publish within the 16-23.5kg weight band* [ ]
* *No, publish all sheep 12 months or younger regardless of what GB decides* [ ]

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

**Automated Grading Methods**

Proposal 6

4.21 We propose to extend the legislative requirements for authorising automated cattle grading methods to the sheep sector and will put in place a fair and transparent process for the authorisation of automated sheep grading methods.

4.22 When the UK was a member of the EU, legislation detailed the authorisation process for automated grading methods for beef, sheep and pigs. That legislation provided requirements for automated grading methods, including an authorisation test to ensure equipment was grading reliably and consistently against the classification scale. Following EU exit, these requirements remain mandatory in the UK pig and cattle sectors, with only minor changes to ensure continued operability in the UK context. Our proposal extends these legislative requirements to sheep.

4.23 When the authorisation of automated grading methods was introduced for cattle, there was existing data on UK cattle carcases classification as reporting of manual classifications had been mandatory for several years. However, sufficient UK data for the sheep sector is not currently available. To enable us to collect the required UK sheep flock data on which we can accurately base the matrix for the authorisation test for automated grading methods, it may be necessary to limit carcase classification to licensed manual graders for a certain period of time. Thereafter, automated sheep grading methods will be able to seek authorisation.

***Question 19: Do you agree or disagree that authorised and licenced automated grading methods should be permitted for the grading of sheep carcases?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

**Process for authorising automated grading methods for sheep and cattle**

Proposal 7

4.24 The authorisation process shown in the diagram below is proposed to be used UK-wide to ensure there is a fair and transparent process wherever in the UK the authorisation is sought.

4.25 By setting out clearly the steps to be taken during the authorisation of automated grading methods we will deliver a process that is open and robust. There will be clear guidance on each step of the process detailed in the diagram below (Figure 1). Legislation will state the test procedure and detail the information to be obtained about the automated technology. In order for an authorisation approved in one administration to be recognised by the other administrations in the UK, we propose for provisions in each administration’s legislation to allow for that arrangement and that the key requirements for authorising automated sheep and cattle grading methods that we used when we were an EU member state will be adapted to fit our domestic circumstances.

4.26 During the calibration and test phases government expert classifiers will be supplied by Defra and the Devolved Governments so that their representation supports a mutually recognised authorisation process within the UK.

 Figure 1: A flow diagram of the steps in the authorisation process of automated sheep and cattle carcase grading methods

**Proposed steps in process for authorising automated grading methods**

Step 1

4.27 A manufacturer or industry representing body may approach government seeking authorisation of an automated grading method. To ensure best use of resources and early elimination of unsuitable grading methods, it is proposed that the manufacturer and/ or industry provides evidence supporting the capability of the technology and information about the automated grading method to government before that grading method is tested.

Step 2

4.28 It is proposed that government expert classifiers set the standard of carcase classification of sheep or cattle during the calibration and validation stage of the authorisation process in order that the equipment can be set to provide suitably accurate carcase grades during both the authorisation test the follow up in-situ licensing process and continued future use.

4.29 We propose that at least three government expert classifiers should be involved to set the classification standard during this stage. This takes into account value for money and resource considerations as well as aligning with the approach used for current authorisation under the beef carcase classification scheme.

Step 3

4.30 It is proposed that an authorisation test would be conducted to ensure the automated grading method is accurately and consistently classifying carcases. We propose that the methodology prescribed in retained EU legislation for testing automated sheep and cattle grading methods is applied for the sheep sector. We have used this method of testing for automated cattle grading technology in the UK. The methodology includes a number of statistical criteria that the test data must fulfil for the automated grading method to be authorised e.g. the percentage failures of the automated grading method are no more than 5% of the carcases that are fit for classification.

4.31 We propose that the authorisation test is independently coordinated. In order that the test coordinator remains impartial we propose that the test coordinator should not be involved with the calibration and/or validation of the technology being tested. An independent body should analyse the authorisation test data.

4.32 During the authorisation test, the equipment’s classification grades are compared to the manual classifications of the same carcases by a jury of five government expert classifiers, to confirm accuracy and consistency. Each administration will provide at least one government grader for the jury. The jury members should work in an independent and anonymous way with the test coordinator ensuring that for the duration of the test, none of the jurors or any other interested party have access to the automated grading method’s classification grades for the carcases being assessed. The test coordinator will validate each carcase and determine its suitability according to various parameters, including correct dressing or hanging presentation (for details on hanging presentation see proposal 10).

Step 4

4.33 The test coordinator will issue government with a report on the conduct, conditions and requirements of the authorisation test and the established accuracy of the automated grading method.

Step 5

4.34 Government will grant or refuse authorisation having reviewed the evidence from the authorisation test and report. Authorised automated grading methods will be listed on GOV.UK with the conditions for which its use is authorised. It is proposed that the authorisation of an automated grading method will state the carcase and hanging presentation(s) used for the test.

***Question 20: Do you agree or disagree with Proposal 7 above, which sets out the process for authorising automated sheep and cattle grading methods?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

**Methodology of Test**

Proposal 8

4.35 We are proposing to legislate that the authorisation test on automated sheep grading methods should follow the methodology that is used in the beef sector as set out in the remainder of this proposal.

4.36 The following will be required:

(a) each of the classes of conformation and of fat cover shall be subdivided into three subclasses;

(b) a representative sample of a minimum of 600 validated carcases (that is carcases of sheep less than 12 months at slaughter and meet the hanging and dressing specifications) shall be required;

(c) the percentage of failures shall be no more than 5% of the carcases that are fit for classification using automated grading methods.

4.37 It is also proposed that for each validated carcase, the median of the results of the members of the jury shall be considered the correct grade of that carcase.

4.38 To estimate the performance of the automated grading method, the results of the automated grading method shall, for each validated carcase, be compared to the median of the results of the jury.

4.39 It is proposed that in order to establish the accuracy of the automated grading method a system of points, attributed as detailed in Table 1 below are used, and that to be authorised the automated grading method should achieve at least 60% of the maximum number of points for both conformation and fat cover.

 Table 1

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Conformation* | *Fat cover* |
| *No error* | *10* | *10* |
| *Error of one unit (i.e. one subclass up or down)* | *6* | *9* |
| *Error of two units (i.e. two subclasses up or down)* | *– 9* | *0* |
| *Error of three units (i.e. three subclasses up or down)* | *– 27* | *– 13* |
| *Error of more than three units (i.e. more than three subclasses up or down)* | *– 48* | *– 30* |

In addition, we propose that the classification resulting from use of the automated grading methods must be within the limits shown in Table 2:

Table 2

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Conformation* | *Fat cover* |
| *Bias* | *± 0,30* | *± 0,60* |
| *Slope of the regression line* | *1 ± 0,15* | *1 ± 0,30* |

***Question 21: Do you agree or disagree with Proposal 8 above, on the methodology to be used to test automated sheep grading methods?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

***Question 22: Are you content that authorisations granted by government are listed, with the terms of authorisation, on Gov.UK.?***

*Yes / No / Don’t know / Not applicable*

*If you wish please comment on the reason for your selection*

*If you have any further comments on the authorisation process being proposed, please make them here*.

**Sheep specific issues for automated grading methods**

4.40 We recognise that some aspects relating to the authorisation of automated sheep carcase grading, e.g. variation in hanging presentation, are different to those of automated beef carcase grading. The main issues and the proposed adaptions are detailed in the sections below.

**New season and old season lamb (lambs and hoggets)**

Proposal 9

4.41 The authorisation test will be conducted on a sample of a minimum 600 carcases, representative of the carcases slaughtered in the UK of sheep aged less than 12 months. To be ’representative’, that sample would include the variety of lamb maturity, seasonality, weights, fat and conformation classes seen in lambs slaughtered in the UK.

4.42 To check the automated grading method can operate accurately and reliably across both hoggets and lambs, it is proposed that the authorisation test be split to test on both at times when there is sufficient access to representative samples of carcases.

4.43 There is a significant variation in the colour and distribution of fat on lambs versus hoggets so software in automated grading methods will need to account for this. It will therefore be necessary for the manufacturers of automated grading technology to be able to calibrate the equipment at times of the year when these types of lamb carcases are readily available. In late summer and early autumn, lambs will be the majority of the slaughterings, with hoggets peaking from January to March.

***Question 23: Do you agree or disagree that automated grading methods must be capable of classifying carcases from lambs and hoggets?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

***Question 24: Do you agree or disagree with Proposal 9 (above), that a minimum of 600 representative sheep carcases are tested?***

*1. Strongly Agree*

*2. Agree*

*3. Neither agree nor disagree*

*4. Disagree*

*5. Strongly Disagree*

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

***Question 25: Do you have any alternative suggestions how the accuracy and reliability of the automated grading method can be ensured/tested when classifying carcases of lambs year-round?***

*If you wish, please provide comments to support your answer.*

**Hanging presentation**

Proposal 10

4.44 To futureproof the legislation, we propose not to mandate a single hanging presentation to be used. However, when authorising equipment, the approval would state the hanging presentation for which the grading method is authorised (i.e. the one that was used in the test).

4.45 In order to prevent industry having to seek multiple authorisations for different hanging presentations, we would encourage industry to unify hanging presentations as much as possible.

4.46 Hanging presentation refers to how a carcase is hung as it moves through an abattoir. Hanging presentation can have a significant effect on the accuracy of automated carcase classification. We are aware that several different hanging presentations are currently in use including cross legged, straight legged, banded, legs together and legs apart, but some of these variations can be achieved after the point of carcase classification. The key hanging presentations necessary at the point of automated grading are legs together (legs on one hook), legs apart (legs hung on a gambrel or A-frame) and front legs down (not banded). These three presentations will be the only ones permitted for automated sheep carcase classification.

***Question 26: If you operate or intend to operate automated grading equipment in the next 5 years, please can you:***

* *confirm what hanging presentation you use, or plan to use? For example - cross legged, straight legged, banded, unbanded, shoulder, legs together, legs apart, other-please specify, N/A;*
* *provide details of what hanging apparatus you use (or plan to use) to hang sheep carcases on your automated line(s)? For example - gambrel, hook, J-hook, A-frame, size and width of apparatus;*
* *comment whether it would it be possible to change the hanging presentation of sheep carcases if required?; and*
* *where relevant, provide an estimate of the cost of changing the hanging presentation you use? For example, an approximate cost of changing from gambels to hooks or vice versa.*

**5. EQUALITY AND RURAL CONSIDERATIONS**

5.1 A draft Equality Impact Assessment screening form was prepared on the proposals contained in the previous consultation on sheep carcase classification and price reporting. It is available here: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-mandatory-sheep-carcase-classification-and-price-reporting>. We invite stakeholders to consider this form and provide feedback on the potential impacts for section 75 Groups and whether the proposals might be modified to promote good relations with Section 75 groups or promote equality of opportunity. If you think the further proposals contained in this document would alter the current assessment of equality considerations, please also detail this here.

5.2 We also invite views on the potential impact on rural areas, taking into account the social and economic needs of people in these areas. Such feedback will help inform the Rural Needs Impact Assessment if a decision is made to take these proposals further.

**6. How to Respond and When**

**Responses**

6.1 We encourage responses to the proposals laid out in Section 4 as well as to the draft EQIA screening form referred to in Section 5. We also invite any views on the impact to rural areas.

6.2 Written responses should be sent to e-mail: AgriFood2@daera-ni.gov.uk

Postal address: Kieran Coghlan

 Pigs, Sheep, Beef and Veterinary Medicine Residues Branch

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

1st Floor West

Clare House

303 Airport Road West

Belfast

BT3 9ED

6.3 When responding, please state whether you are doing so as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents, and where applicable, how the views of its members were assembled. Please also consider section 4.1 - 4.7 regarding confidentiality.

**Closing date**

6.4 Responses should be submitted by 17 March 2024.

**7. LIST OF CONSULTEES**

ABP Lurgan

ABP Newry

Antrim Quality Lamb (AQL)

Armagh Quality Lamb Marketing Group

DMP Foods Limited

Dunbia (Dawn Meats)

Elite Butchers Association Northern Ireland

Foyle Food Group

Frontmatec Group

Lakeview Farm Meats Limited

Linden Foods

Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland

Marel

Marta Teknoloji

Mid Tyrone Lamb Group

MLCSL/Vorenta

National Beef Association (NI region)

National Sheep Association (NI region)

Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association

Northern Ireland Livestock Auctioneers Association

Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA)

Primestock

Strangford Down Lamb Group

Suffolk Sheep Society

Ulster Farmers’ Union

WD Meats