

FOOD CHAIN INFORMATION (FCI)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is Food Chain Information (FCI)?

The new EU Hygiene Regulations which came into force in 2006 recognised all primary producers – including pig farms – as food producers, and formalised the 'farm-to-fork' concept. From 1 January 2008 producers will be required to provide information – Food Chain Information - to the slaughterhouse about pigs sent for slaughter. There is no additional record-keeping requirement for producers – all the required information should be readily available.

2. Who is responsible for introducing FCI

The Food Standards Agency is the authority in the UK which has responsibility for ensuring that the legislation relating to FCI is applied in the UK, through the Meat Hygiene Service. The abattoir is legally responsible for ensuring that it collects all necessary information to comply with the FCI elements of the EU legislation.

3. Why is it being introduced?

To ensure that abattoirs have all the information they need about the pigs they receive to apply HACCP-based food safety systems. FCI will also be used by FSA and MHS in introducing simplified inspection systems.

4. When does it start?

The submission of FCI for pigs starts on 1 January 2008.

5. What do I have to do as a pig producer?

As a producer you are required to give the abattoir one-off information about your site (see page 1 of Draft Guidance) and then to send FCI for every consignment of pigs you send for slaughter (see page 2 of Draft Guidance). The abattoir operator will tell you exactly what information he requires, and how he wishes to receive it.

6. What do I have to do as a pig abattoir?

As an abattoir operator you need to decide what FCI that you require for your own needs and to comply with the legislation. You should obtain the production site details (see page 1 of Draft Guidance) for each supplier – these are needed only once, and up-dated as necessary. You then need to ensure that you receive FCI for every batch of pigs sent to you for slaughter (see page 2 of Draft Guidance). Many abattoirs will already be asking for much of this information for their own and their customers' needs.

7. Do I need to send FCI with every load of pigs or just once for all deliveries I send to an abattoir that day?

You need to complete and send FCI for every consignment/load of pigs you send to an abattoir.

8. Does the FCI have to be sent to the abattoir before the pigs are delivered or can I send the FCI with the actual consignment of pigs?

No. FCI information can be submitted either prior to the pigs being sent or with the consignment itself. It is for the abattoir receiving the pigs to decide when they wish to receive FCI information. Abattoirs may wish to receive the FCI in advance to help them plan their slaughter schedule for the day.

9. Do I still need to send an AML2 form?

Yes the AML2 form is a legal requirement for animal disease control purposes.

10. Do I still need to send a 'casualty' pig form as well as an FCI form?

No - the FCI document contains all the information previously contained in the 'casualty' pig form.

11. Do I have to add an identity mark to all pigs that have received treatment in the past 28 days?

No - you only have to identify any 'casualty' animals in the load.

12. Why can't I just send in an AML2 form and any medicine records for pigs treated in the past 28 days?

The abattoir has to be satisfied that the information you send prior to or with the consignment of pigs fulfils the FCI requirements and satisfies their own information needs. The draft guidance on FCI sent to abattoirs or available from BPEX and NPA websites by FSA can be used by abattoirs as the basis for their own electronic or paper documents.

13. Do I need to send any previous FCI forms with consignments of pigs?

No, the Food Standards Agency has listened to the industry's concerns and has recognised the practical difficulties of providing inspection reports for previous consignments in some circumstances - it has decided not to apply this requirement for now. It will reconsider this matter later when the new MHS system for collecting and reporting inspection results has been running for a while. FSA will shortly be issuing revised draft guidance on FCI.

14. What is a herdmark?

The herdmark is the same as the slapmark for most businesses unless you have registered more than one slapmark with a unit.

If you have more than one slapmark registered with your unit then you should enter only the original slapmark as the herdmark.

15. I sell my pigs via a market or collection centre, how can I provide FCI if I don't know how many pigs are being sent to which abattoirs once they have been sold?

The practical advice is for markets and abattoirs to co-operate so that the FCI required by regular buyers is known. For producers selling pigs via a market where the destination abattoir is unknown or where the pigs are split into different groups and moved to separate abattoirs, the advice is to send a single FCI form with the pigs to market, but to leave the consignment number and destination abattoir blank. The market can then complete the detail regarding destination abattoir and number of pigs and, if the consignment is split, photocopy and complete the form as necessary.

16. Where can I obtain a blank FCI form from?

There are three options for sending FCI:

Obtain a form from your abattoir – paper or electronic

Design your own form subject to approval from your abattoir

Use the BPEX online service www.bpex-fci.org.uk

17. What is the BPEX online system?

The BPEX online system is an internet service which allows you to send FCI information to abattoirs and receive back MHS condemnation results. The system links to various databases so users just have to point and click to submit FCI information rather than having to fill out documents by hand.

If you use the BPEX system you have to complete and submit your FCI information before 4.00am on the day of sending your pigs as all FCI information is sent to the abattoir in a single e-mail at 5.30am.

18. What is the difference between completing the paper form and using the BPEX online system?

If you register with the BPEX online service www.bpex-fci.org.uk you only have to enter information about your business e.g name, address, vet etc once and then it is stored. Therefore the amount of information you have to enter for each load of pigs sent is greatly reduced and the time taken to complete an FCI form should be a matter of a few seconds not several minutes of additional form filling.

If you are an assured producer you only need to enter your assurance number and post code and all your business details are automatically updated.

The BPEX system also enables you to receive MHS condemnation results back electronically within 48 hours.

The BPEX system contains a number of databases such as lists of abattoirs, veterinary practices and medicines (including withdrawal periods) so you only have to point and click rather than writing out lots of answers.

By using the BPEX online system you can submit your FCI form in advance of sending the pigs (the latest you can submit a form online is 4.00am in the day of sending the pigs as the system sends all FCI information to all abattoirs at 5.30am)

19. What happens if I use the BPEX system and enter on the system that I am sending 200 pigs the day before sending them to slaughter but only send 198 when I actually come to load them on the actual day?

The FCI document is not like the AML2 traceability document therefore the precise number of pigs in the consignment can vary from the numbers provided with the FCI.

20. Why isn't the AML2 form and the FCI form combined as a lot of the information is duplicated?

Defra requires movement information for disease control purposes on its own, official AML2 form. There is a duplication of information on the two forms and the pig industry is trying to encourage Defra to permit movement information to be included in customised documents (paper or electronic) also containing FCI. This has not been possible to date but this remains a priority to reduce the burden of administration and duplication for producers and abattoirs.

21. Why have I only just heard about this?

The introduction of FCI for the pig industry has been reported in pig industry press, industry organisations and assurance scheme newsletters, and letters have recently been sent to all abattoirs, pig marketing groups and industry representative bodies. Since responsibility for requesting and receiving FCI rests with abattoirs, FSA has taken the view that abattoirs should decide what FCI they require and how they want to receive it, and then contact their suppliers to make arrangements.

22. Can the introduction of FCI be postponed?

No - the requirement for FCI will commence on 1 January 2008. However FSA and MHS recognise that this is a new requirement and that 100% compliance may not occur immediately. We understand that the MHS have advised their staff that initially abattoirs can still process pigs that are received with no FCI. However after the first month, pigs arriving at abattoirs without FCI will not be health marked until the abattoir and MHS staff have received the FCI documentation. Please do not leave it until the last moment to start sending FCI as this is likely to cause unavoidable disruption to slaughterhouse operations.

23. Who decided on the information that is included in the FCI form?

The EU legislation states what information the abattoir is responsible for collecting. The abattoir is responsible for collecting the information. The Food Standards Agency has worked with industry to develop draft guidance that it believes fulfils the requirements of the FCI legislation in a simple and practical manner. The aim of the draft guidance is to assist abattoirs in drawing up their own systems for receiving FCI.

Industry organisations have discussed the FCI forms with FSA to try and minimise the additional burden FCI will place on individual pig businesses and abattoirs.

24. What will happen if I don't send a completed FCI form with my pigs?

It is the responsibility of the abattoir to collect FCI information. If FCI is not provided the legislation from 01 Jan 2008 requires that carcasses are not health marked and therefore cannot enter the food chain. We understand that the MHS have advised their staff that initially abattoirs can still process pigs that are received with no FCI. However after the first month, pigs arriving at abattoirs without FCI will not be health marked until the abattoir and MHS staff have received the FCI documentation. Please do not leave it until the last moment to start sending FCI as this is likely to cause unavoidable disruption to slaughterhouse operations.

25. Why does FCI have to be provided for pigs from January 2008 when cattle and sheep don't?

The EU legislation sets out the timetable for the introduction for FCI. The poultry industry was required to start FCI from January 2006, the pig industry from January 2008 and the cattle and sheep industries will need to complete FCI in the coming years.

