



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP
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Huw Merriman MP
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17 January 2023

Dear Huw,

Thank you for your letter of 18 November about Tottingworth Abattoir and local abattoir provision.

I was saddened to hear the news that Tottingworth abattoir will close in January 2023. I recognise how important this business was for many farmers in the local area and the difficulties that its closure will cause. We are fortunate that there are two other abattoirs in the Kent and Sussex area that are in a position to expand their operations to take on the work that the Tottingworth closure will create.

Please be assured that the Government recognises the important role small and medium sized abattoirs play in supporting the rural economy, and we are very much committed to engaging with the small abattoir sector to maintain a robust and competitive industry.

To this end, Defra chairs the Small Abattoirs Working Group (SAWG) which brings together representatives of Defra, the Food Standards Agency (FSA), the Rural Payments Agency and the small abattoir sector, including the Abattoir Sector Group (ASG) which was set up in 2020. This group provides a platform to discuss the complex and varied issues faced by small abattoirs.

In early 2022 the SAWG was supplemented by the creation of a joint Small Abattoirs Task and Finish Group. This smaller Group is co-chaired by Defra and the ASG and includes representatives from across the small abattoir sector. The Group meets regularly to explore solutions to the priority issues identified by industry.

I would also like to reassure your constituents that Defra is fully supportive of finding innovative solutions to address the problems faced by the decline in small abattoir numbers, including the use of mobile abattoir units. Through the Rural Development Programme for England Growth programme, Defra part-funded a farmer-led mobile abattoir project which trialled the use of a compact mobile abattoir unit for the local slaughter of livestock. The unit received full FSA approval in August 2022 and is now successfully operating commercially at two sites. Lessons learned from this project could be used within industry to support stakeholders looking to replicate it.

In June 2022 Defra launched the Adding Value Theme of the Farming Investment Fund, where producers wishing to apply for funding towards an abattoir or mobile abattoir were eligible to do so. Round 1 of the scheme has now closed for applications. At this stage, it is our intention that funding for producer-owned abattoirs and mobile abattoir units will continue to remain eligible should there be any future rounds of the Adding Value Theme.

This could therefore potentially support any producers wishing to replicate the aforementioned mobile abattoir project. The Farming Investment Fund is, however, competitive, and therefore each proposal would be judged on its merits and against all others seeking funding.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M Spencer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a period at the end.

Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP