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Registration of abattoirs to ensure safe meat

by Dr Marthinus Wolhuter

Meat is a great source of high-quality protein, minerals and vitamins that the body needs. It is therefore an important part of the diet of many people.

! Many, however, fail to realise that meat is also a potential carrier of serious biohazards. Possibly fatal food-borne pathogens include bacteria such as *Campylobacter*, *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella* and many more. Tape worms and tuberculosis can be transmitted through meat. Residues of veterinary medicines also pose a risk.



Enter the Meat Safety Act, Act 40 of 2000. The aim of the Act is "to provide for measures to promote meat safety and the safety of animal products". In the Western Cape, the Department of Agriculture, in particular the sub-programme: Veterinary Public Health, is mandated to enforce the prescripts of the Meat Safety Act.

Meat that passes through the rigorous measures of the Meat Safety Act and its Regulations is safeguarded against risks and is marked as being fit for human consumption. »



A Veterinary Public Health Official discusses construction of an abattoir at a visit to ensure construction is being done according to the approved drawings.

One of the most important measures is that meat produced for human consumption may only be slaughtered in an approved and registered abattoir that complies with all the food safety measures set by the Act.

A The registration of an abattoir is by no means an easy task. The following steps have to be completed by a prospective abattoir owner:

- Design and construction drawings must be approved by Veterinary Public Health officials to ensure that the abattoir layout conforms to the legal requirements that guarantee meat safety.
- The abattoir has to be constructed strictly according to the approved drawings.
- When the abattoir is ready, a trial slaughter is carried out. During the trial, officials of Veterinary Public Health confirm that only safe meat is produced. If successful, the abattoir is then legally registered.

B Of course, it is not only the abattoir building itself that has to be legally compliant. The prospective abattoir owner also has to ensure, amongst others, the following:

- Compile a full set of formal standard operation procedures, called a Hygiene Management System, to be carried out in the abattoir to ensure that all processes comply with the Act and thereby ensure that meat is produced safely. Procedures range from ensuring the health and welfare of animals upon arrival at the abattoir to adequate chilling of meat after slaughter.
- An independent meat inspection service has to be procured. The duty of the meat inspectors is to ensure that general hygiene is maintained at the abattoir at all times and that each carcass is inspected to ensure that the meat is safe.
- The water used in the abattoir must be tested to ensure that it is potable and will not contaminate the meat.
- Provision has to be made to ensure safe disposal of abattoir effluent, abattoir waste, e.g., intestinal content and blood, and to dispose safely of meat found to be unfit for human consumption.





C Compliance with the requirements of the Meat Safety Act is not the only requirement for an abattoir owner to operate a legal abattoir. The following legislation is also applicable, and the abattoir will only be registered when proof is offered that these legal processes have been successfully completed:

- Even before the placement of an abattoir can be considered, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning in the Western Cape has to grant approval to ensure that the abattoir will not impact negatively on the environment.
- Zoning requirements of the local authority have to be complied with.
- The local authorities also have to approve the building plans in terms of local building ordinances.
- The Department of Water and Sanitation has to approve the effluent plans for the abattoir.



Inside an abattoir under construction.

“ Meat that passes through the rigorous measures of the Meat Safety Act and its Regulations is safeguarded against risks. ”



An abattoir under construction.



TWO OF THE IMPORTANT DRIVERS BEHIND A SUCCESSFUL ABATTOIR VENTURE ARE:

- 1** Abattoir throughput in terms of the number of animals slaughtered per day - the more animals that are slaughtered, the lower the cost per unit.
- 2** The input costs - the less the input costs, the more the profitability. Expenses at the abattoir include water, electricity, employee salaries, meat inspection, maintenance and cleaning, to mention a few. **AP**

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