



Ban on Slaughter of Live Poultry in Traditional Wet Markets

Hwang-Jaw Lee, PhD
Board Director, Taiwan Flowers Development Association

It is estimated that a total of 20,000 chickens are killed in traditional markets in Taiwan each day, a relatively small number compared to the number of birds butchered in the 79 licensed poultry slaughterhouses around the island. An officer of the Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine under the agriculture ministry pointed out that “Veterinarians are employed at the slaughterhouses to examine the poultry.”, “Poultry from live poultry slaughtering stands is not necessarily the “freshest,” as many people believe.”

A professor in the animal science and technology department at National Taiwan University said that bird flu viruses are easily transmitted via poultry feces, dust, earth and contaminated surfaces including cages, knives, cutting boards, containers, foodstuffs and clothes in traditional markets. “Not only is a traditional market an ideal place for cross-species transmission of bird flu viruses that can result in genetic recombination of the viruses, but from the point of view of animal welfare live poultry slaughter in markets is also inhumane,” He said, adding that having chickens caged in small coops witnessing the slaughter of other chickens is extremely cruel.

The proposal to ban the slaughtering of live poultry has been discussed several times in the past few years, starting in 2004, but the policy was postponed until 2008, and then again postponed until 2010, with local governments having the authority to allow exceptional conditions. However the policy is still not enforced in a uniform fashion across the nation.

In response to the threat of an H7N9 avian flu epidemic, the Council of Agriculture (COA) decided a total ban on the slaughter of live poultry in traditional wet markets and this was implemented nationwide beginning May 17th of 2013. Violators will be fined between NT\$20,000 and NT\$100,000.

The Council of Agriculture (COA) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs offered rewards to slaughterhouses, poultry distributors and live poultry slaughtering stands in traditional markets. The measure aims to stabilize the supply of poultry meat and facilitate the transition of the slaughter of poultry from traditional markets to slaughterhouses. A government official stated that a two-week period before the imposition of the ban on live poultry slaughter, the council is to give a subsidy of NT\$10 for each extra chicken butchered in slaughterhouses, with last month's average daily slaughter as the basis for comparison. The ratio of reward distribution between the distributor or wholesaler and the slaughterhouse is 8:2, meaning that for each chicken slaughtered in the slaughterhouse, the distributor gets NT\$8 and the slaughterhouse NT\$2. He added that for licensed vendors who have been slaughtering live poultry, estimated to be 1,051 in total, a discount of NT\$15 will be offered for each poultry item bought from a certified slaughterhouse. Ministry official also said the ministry is to subsidize each licensed live poultry slaughtering stand in traditional markets with NT\$100,000 (US\$3,400) to help them cope with the change. "Those who accepted the subsidy have to adhere to the policy by terminating slaughtering in the markets and agreeing to sell certified meat from certified slaughterhouses," he said.

Date submitted: December 22, 2013

Reviewed, edited and uploaded: December 31, 2013