



RUOKAVIRASTO
Livsmedelsverket • Finnish Food Authority

Halal black market meat

Sanna Toivanen

Chief Specialist in
Crime Prevention Team in Food Chain Division
Finnish Food Authority

Nordisk tilsynskonferanse 2026

20.1.2026



Strange Data in the Sheep Register

- The Finnish Food Authority's (FFA's) animal by-product (ABP) control team received a monthly summary from the animal register and noticed “unusual” entries in the sheep register.
- On some farms, very large numbers of animals were recorded as:
 - home-slaughtered
 - missing
 - dead
- For some farms, these entries were one-off (e.g., 150 sheep reported missing on the same winter day), while others had recurring entries every month, such as 15 home slaughters per month.



How to address the issue?

- There is strong reason to believe that these entries hide something other than normal livestock production:
 - meat from animals recorded as “home-slaughtered/missing/dead” ends up in the food chain — but through which route and by whom?
 - it may also involve so-called “ghost sheep,” meaning that farmers have registered animals that do not exist because of animal subsidies. These sheep are removed from the register as home-slaughtered/missing/dead.
 - in some cases, there may be an undetected animal welfare problem.
- The challenge: There is no point to control these farms only from the perspective of ABP legislation → need for a multidisciplinary approach: crucial for the investigation request, calculation of illicit gain and in court proceeding.

Multidisciplinary approach

Sheep farm



Use of Foreign Labour

Offences: labour crime(s)
Criminal benefit: X euros

Burial of ABPs from Sheep/Home Slaughter

Offences: environmental damage, animal by-product legislation violation, causing risk of animal disease spread
Criminal benefit: X euros

Providing False Information to the Animal Register

Offences: register entry offence, subsidy fraud
Criminal benefit: X euros

Black Market Meat Sales

Offence: tax fraud
Criminal benefit: X euros

Slaughter Without Meat Inspection

Offence: health offence
Criminal benefit: X euros

Cutting and Handling Meat in Improper Conditions

Offence: health offence
Criminal benefit: X euros

Selling the Uninspected Meat to Consumers / Selling Sheep Meat as Lamb

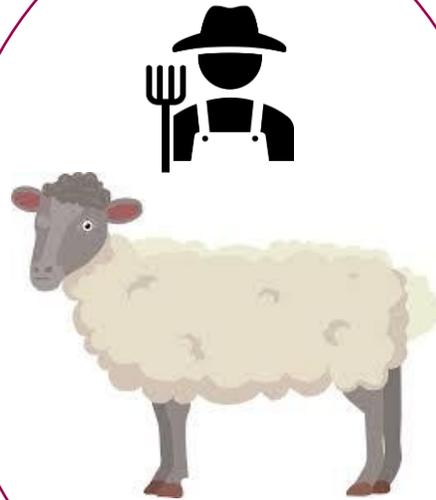
Offences: marketing offence, fraud
Criminal benefit: X euros

Agricultural Subsidies

Offences: subsidy fraud, forgery
Criminal benefit: X euros

Animal Welfare Issues

Offences: animal welfare offence, aggravated animal welfare offence
Criminal benefit: X euros





RUOKAVIRASTO
Livsmedelsverket • Finnish Food Authority

Inspection Visit to a Sheep Farm in 2018



Municipal veterinarian's visit to a sheep farm

- Tip-off in Autumn 2018 about illegal slaughter in the area of the West Coast Environmental Unit
- The municipal veterinarian visited the sheep farm December 2018 and opened a dead animal + examined sick animals
 - During the same visit, observed slaughtering of animals taking place on the farm and called the supervisor to the site
 - The supervisor arrived with police assistance
 - Veterinary visit turned to official inspection

Photos from the inspection













Animal by-products intended for burial (in collection area)





Findings During the Inspection

- 18 slaughtered sheep carcasses were found during the inspection.
 - The municipal veterinarian observed signs of common liver fluke (*Fasciola hepatica/Dicrocoelium dendriticum*) in the livers
 - these livers were intended for food use.
- As a result of the inspection, authorities obtained the slaughterer's name and the animal holding ID used for acquiring animals.



RUOKAVIRASTO
Livsmedelsverket • Finnish Food Authority

Cooperation between Different Authorities



Step 1: local and regional cooperation → first investigation request to the police

- The municipality prepared an inspection report and a decision for the slaughterer on January 2019 (18 sheep).
- The Regional State Administrative Agency submitted a request for investigation to the police on February 2019 → one slaughterer and two sheep farmers (just under 300 sheep)

→ **Cooperation between the municipality and the Regional State Administrative Agency** during the inspection and while drafting the request for investigation was essential!



Step 2– multi authority cooperation → second investigation request to the police

- Joint meeting of authorities in November 2019 – municipality, two regional authorities, FFA, Police and Prosecutor
- FFA combined the ABP control, animal register information and animal holding ID (animals marked as sold had no receipt confirmation) in a new way
- Second investigation request to the police made by the FFA October 2020
 - 10 sheep farms
 - over 1100 sheep
- **Internal cooperation within the FFA** (especially within the Animal department) was essential.



Step 3 – cooperation during police investigation

- Contact persons were appointed for the case both from Police and from the FFA.
 - Police used secret coercive measures: telecommunications surveillance measures (e.g., call records, emails, WhatsApp conversations, **location data**), home searches, seizures, bank account transactions and detention (7 individuals).
 - Police investigation material (1,800 pages) was ready June 2021
 - 2500 sheep
 - 30 suspects (2 slaughterers and 28 animal keepers)
 - 88 type of crime
- **Effective cooperation between the Police and the FFA was key to uncovering the scale of the activities in terms of time and geography.**



Trial November 2022

- The prosecutor's indictment included 34 charges and 11 defendants; there were 8 hearing days and 3 extra days.
- The prosecutor demanded that the principal offender be sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment and pay over 100,000 € in illicit gains to the state.



Court sentence



- The principal offender (slaughterer) was sentenced to a combined **prison term of 2 years and 3 months** for multiple offenses:
 - health offense, aggravated animal welfare offense, environmental degradation, register entry offense, tax fraud
 - **ordered to pay 66,863 € to the state as illicit gain**
 - permanent ban on keeping production animals
- The second slaughterer was sentenced to a combined **1-year suspended prison term** for multiple offenses:
 - health offense, aggravated animal welfare offense, animal by-product law violation, register entry offense
 - **ordered to pay 4.243 € to the state as illicit gain**
 - permanent ban on keeping production animals
- **Seven sheep farmers were convicted**, sentences ranged from 10 day-fines to 1 year of suspended imprisonment.



What we learned?

- Sometimes a single inspection and/or a piece of critical data can uncover nationwide crime.
- The subject, scope, and boundaries of the investigation changed several times along the way:
 - 18 sheep grew to 2,500 sheep during the police investigation
 - The period under review expanded from a single case to more than 10 years
 - The location widened from one farm to systematic activity covering all of Finland
- The case could not have grown this large without the cooperation of the municipality, regional and central authorities, the Police and the Prosecutor!

There is strength in cooperation!



RUOKAVIRASTO

Livsmedelsverket • Finnish Food Authority

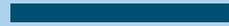
Thank you!

Finnish Crime Prevention Team in Food Chain Division

sanna.toivanen@ruokavirasto.fi/rikostorjunta@ruokavirasto.fi



RUOKAVIRASTO
Livsmedelsverket • Finnish Food Authority



An Interesting CBC News Clip: Growing halal meat demand feeding a potentially dangerous Alberta black market

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnPA7j35LpQ>

