

## Outdoor slaughter in Switzerland



Bild: Gabriela Müller

*For the outdoor slaughtering, farmer Nils Müller takes the animals in their familiar group to a separate...*

Transport to the slaughter house and the busy environment are stress factors for animals that have negative effects on meat quality. With the support of the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (Forschungsinstitut für biologischen Landbau, FiBL) and VIER PFOTEN, an animal welfare organisation, farmer Nils Müller has been driving the introduction of outdoor slaughtering, a method previously banned in Switzerland.

**It is a first for Switzerland: after a protracted process, in 2014 farmer Nils Müller was granted limited partial**

**authorisation from the Veterinary Office in Zurich to carry out ten outdoor slaughters on his farm. The animal-friendly system ensures that the animals to be slaughtered can remain in their familiar environment until their death. At the Zur Chalte Hose farm in Forch, Switzerland, those responsible for the project have presented the first positive results from their work at the start of June 2015 after three successful outdoor slaughters.**

Mr Müller and his wife, Ms Claudia Wanger, have established a separate enclosure with an adjacent raised hide. From this hide, the farmer, who completed his hunter training specifically for this purpose, can target the animals selected for slaughter from a short distance and stun them using a shot. The cattle must then be collected within 90 seconds using a front loader so that it can be rapidly bled. Using a special trailer, Mr Müller brings the slaughtered carcasses to the nearby local abattoir where they are cut up less than one hour after death.

“Even after just three slaughters, from my point of view there is no better way to set up the last day of the lives of my animals,” said Nils Müller. “You can see and sense that the animals are not exposed to any stress at all because they remain in their usual environment and they have their herd around them up to the time when they are stunned.” Behavioural researcher Johanna Probst from the FiBL confirmed the farmer’s findings: “Separating the animal from the herd, loading it onto the transporter, the transport itself and then restraining the animal for stunning in the abattoir are stressful situations for the animal. Cattle are herd animals and separation usually means stress. With outdoor slaughtering, this stressful step is omitted because several cattle are placed in the pasture enclosure and the animal to be slaughtered is selected just before the shot.”

Eric Meili, who is responsible for the project at the FiBL, considers the new method an opportunity for cattle fattening operators specialising in animal-friendly husbandry: “Outdoor slaughtering is a niche for slaughtering animals that ensures the highest possible animal welfare and meat quality,” according to Mr Meili. “We are convinced that the method is a good opportunity for direct-marketing producers to satisfy the rigorous demands placed on animal husbandry prior to slaughter. Outdoor slaughtering therefore guarantees premium meat from animals who have been able to live and die with dignity.”

“It is important for us that animal suffering is substantially reduced by outdoor slaughtering,” said Sabine Hartmann from the animal welfare organisation VIER PFOTEN, explaining their commitment to the project. The project is also about respectful handling of the animal up to its death: “Animal welfare must not stop at the pasture fence but continue until the end of life has been assured,” said Ms Hartmann. “We also believe that the outdoor slaughtering project is a pioneering project.”

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