



In collaboration with



TECHNICAL BRIEFING

November 2025

PERMITTED METHODS OF EUTHANASIA

Following unanimous agreement from the Red Tractor Pigs Board, new guidance on permitted methods of euthanasia will be added to the Red Tractor Pigs Standards, effective from 1 February 2026.

The Red Tractor Pigs Sector Board has acted swiftly and in close consultation with industry representatives to update the guidance.

The new guidance removes ambiguity relating to the existing standard AH.9.1.b by helping to clarify permitted methods of euthanasia. It follows recent high-profile cases where individuals on Red Tractor assured units have euthanised pigs, using methods that are not permitted, posing a serious risk to the industry's reputation and to the individual member. Red Tractor therefore reviewed existing legislation and interpretations to produce this guidance.

The new Red Tractor guidance clarifies that any blunt force trauma used on small pigs must be mechanical blunt force trauma, using a tool such as the Cash Small Animal Tool.

The aim is to ensure that all euthanasia practices remain fully compliant with legal requirements, upholding the reputation of the industry.

In cases of exceptional emergencies where the permitted methods cannot be used, the method used should be recorded, along with justification on a case-by-case basis.

The Red Tractor Pigs Sector Board will continue to work with NPA, PVS, UFU and other stakeholders to review industry developments and our standards in the light of new developments.

What members need to know

- **New guidance on euthanasia has been added to the Pigs Standards** – the guidance provides clarity on permitted methods of euthanasia.
- **The standards have not changed** – The Red Tractor Pigs Standard has always required producers to use legally permitted methods of euthanasia.

What is changing from 1 February 2026

- **Guidance on permitted methods of euthanasia is being added to the Pigs Standard** – this reflects current interpretations of legislation.
- **Record and justify** - any use of a method that is not a permitted method in an **exceptional emergency** must be recorded including justification for use of that method.

Other considerations, already reflected in existing standards

- **Trained staff only** – all euthanasia must be performed by personnel trained by a qualified individual, such as a vet registered with the Red Tractor scheme or Humane Slaughter Association (HSA). Training and competence should be included in training records and the veterinary health plan/euthanasia policy.
- **Mechanical blunt force trauma, using a specifically designed device, should be used as the primary method of euthanasia for piglets**, including piglets under 5kg, and as such producers should have the necessary equipment available on farm and staff trained to use it.

Red Tractor is adding guidance to AH.9.1.b and AH.2.d from 1 February 2026:

AH.9.1.b requires that only legally methods are used. New guidance from February 2026:

Red Tractor accepts the use of the following methods of euthanasia (in no particular order):

- *chemical euthanasia by overdose of an anaesthetic drug carried out by veterinary surgeon*
- *free bullet*
- *shot gun*
- *penetrative captive bolt followed swiftly by pithing or bleeding such that the animal dies without regaining consciousness*
- *for piglets under 10kg only, a non-penetrative captive bolt provided that the device is capable of delivering a force equivalent to or greater than 27.7 joules*

AH.2.d requires that mortality is recorded. New guidance from 1 February 2026:

Where a method that is not permitted is used in an exceptional emergency, the use must be recorded with accompanying written justification for the method.

Questions & Answers

Q: Why has this guidance been updated now?

A: For several years, the Pig Veterinary Society (PVS), National Pig Association (NPA), and government agencies have sought to clarify the legal interpretation of an “emergency” that potentially allowed the euthanasia of piglets using non-mechanical blunt force trauma (NMBFT). Red Tractor have reviewed legislation to help provide clarity for producers.

Additionally, increased scrutiny of on-farm euthanasia practices by concerned groups has highlighted cases of improper procedures.

The Red Tractor Pigs Standard (AH.9.1) has always required that ‘only legal methods’ of euthanasia are used.

It's important to note that NMBFT is **not** a permitted method for **routine euthanasia** on commercial pig farms. Routine euthanasia of young piglets, for example on breeding units, is not interpreted as an emergency, or series of emergencies, because it can be reasonably foreseen and planned for, according to current interpretations.

Q: Who made this decision?

A: Decisions and legal interpretations about euthanasia are made by legislators, and the current position has become clearer in recent months.

Industry representatives including producers, the National Pig Association (NPA), the Pig Veterinary Society (PVS) and other stakeholders on the Red Tractor Pigs Board reviewed legislation, recent interpretation and increasing scrutiny on the sector. At its November 2025 meeting, the Red Tractor Pigs Sector Board unanimously agreed to issue guidance that will ensure farms are aligned with current requirements

The aim is to ensure that euthanasia practices align with requirements, uphold the reputation of the industry, and provide guidance for members.

Q: Why hasn't there been consultation with members?

A: The standards themselves have not changed, they still require only legal methods of euthanasia to be used and that all animal deaths be recorded. The additional guidance is being issued to clarify current interpretations quickly, so members can be confident their practices meet expectations.

Q: What changes in behaviour or evidence are required on farm?

A: If NMBFT was previously used, an alternative, permitted method must now be used. For piglets under 10kg, including piglets under 5kg, this could include a non-penetrative captive bolt tool capable of delivering at least 27.7 joules of force, as described in the manufacturer's specification.

Existing standards still apply:

- Anyone performing euthanasia must be trained in the method used.
- Training and competence should be included in training records and veterinary health plan/euthanasia policy.

From 1st February 2026:

- Mortality records should include details of exceptional emergencies where there is the use of any method that is not permitted, such as NMBFT. The record should include a clear justification for the method used and the exceptional circumstances.
- A template for recording this is [available here](#).

Q: What do I do if I don't have the appropriate training or devices in place?

A: For those who will struggle to do so by 1 February 2026, an extension to the deadline for closing out a non-conformance can be applied for from your Certification Body (NSF). NSF will consider this request based on evidence that progress is being made to close the non-conformance, such as a scheduled quarterly vet visit or awaiting the delivery of appropriate tools.

Q: How do I schedule training?

A: Training should be completed by all those who undertake euthanasia on the unit. Most members do this with their vet who needs to confirm competence in the methods used, in your veterinary health plan. Auditors will assess this in the normal way - by checking training records and veterinary health plans, and discussions with stockpeople.

Q: Can Red Tractor recommend tools for MBFT for piglets?

A: We're not able to recommend a particular tool to use for MBFT for piglets, although it should be noted that the device must be capable of delivering a force of at least 27.7 joules as described in the manufacturers' specification.