

Name:	Mike Caine
Location:	Shropshire
Profession:	Fallen stock collector
Highs:	Providing a good service
Lows:	Paperwork and increasing costs

Mike Caine: "When a new regulation comes in, there's usually a cost"

Disposable income

text Rachael Porter

It's not the cheeriest of jobs – the 'knackerman' is rarely a welcome sight on farm. But it's a vital role and a job that Mike Caine – like the three generations of his family before him – prides himself on doing well.

Based at Knighton, close to the Welsh borders, Mike has worked as a fallen stock collector for the past 35 years and has seen many changes. Much of it relates to 'red tape' and the regulations concerning fallen stock and disposal. What hasn't changed is the sadness that greets him on many dairy units, coupled with relief if an animal is suffering and needs to be humanely culled using a captive bolt.

Mike is on call 24 hours a day for just such emergencies, though he says that they're not too common and his hours are typically 8am until 5.00pm. "I offer a same-day pick up for farms within an 80-mile radius – a mixture of dairy, beef and sheep units – providing they don't call too late in the day. And if there's an animal emergency – perhaps a cow is down and in pain – then I'll drop everything and deal with that first."

Picking up fallen stock and bringing it back to the slaughterhouse facilities as his Shropshire-based HQ is just part of his daily routine. Much of his time is taken up with paperwork. "That's a much bigger part of the job now – just as it is in most lines of work."

In fact, Mike spends quite a lot of time at the office, supervising three slaughter men and 10 drivers, who man 10 lorries.

Many of the carcasses picked up are skinned, depending on their age. They have to be from cattle that are less than 48

months old, for example, to have a sale value. "And some carcasses are supplied to zoos, to feed big cats," says Mike. "That requires different paperwork, but we have the kit in our slaughterhouse to cut the carcasses up as required." All offal is placed in a skip and taken away to be incinerated.

The biggest change during Mike's career followed the BSE crisis. Fallen stock collectors are now paid by producers to take carcasses away, whereas there was a time when he'd pay for any stock he collected. "We used to pay around £5 or £6 for each cow, but post BSE the people who picked up the offal started to charge us. So we had to start charging producers and the trade really dropped away from that point on."

Now Mike charges producers based on what his business can glean from the carcasses he collects and any costs he incurs. "We pride ourselves on being fair. If the market value of a particular animal is higher, we pass some of that back to the producer by reducing our collection and disposal fee."

Business is OK, according to Mike. And it's certainly more varied than it used to be following the ban on burying carcasses.

"It's illegal to bury zoo animals, so we also pick up from the local safari park and have taken crocodiles and tigers in the past. It certainly keeps our slaughter men on their toes!"

And Mike works hard to keep costs to producers and everyone else using his services as low as possible.

"It's not easy. Every time a new regulation comes in, there's usually a cost attached. But we've managed so far and we'll continue to do our very best."

