



AIMS 25th Anniversary Conference Speech – 24 April 2026 *Dr Jason K Aldiss BEM, Executive Director, AIMS*

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, friends—

It is both a privilege and a moment of no small consequence to stand before you today, marking 25 years of AIMS.

A quarter of a century ago, this organisation was born out of crisis—the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak—a moment when the fragility of our food system was laid bare. AIMS was forged not in comfort, but in adversity. And it is perhaps fitting that we gather again today at a time when the pressures upon our industry are, once more, profound.

But let me be clear from the outset: this is not a speech about decline.

It is a speech about failure—yes—but more importantly, about reform, renewal, and leadership.

The Evolution of AIMS — From Disruptor to Standard Bearer

Before we talk about where we must go, it is worth reflecting—briefly, but honestly—on where we have come from.

AIMS did not begin life as part of the establishment.

It began as something far less comfortable for many in the system— an upstart, a disruptor... some would say, a rogue – the rebel alliance.

It challenged. It questioned. And, at times, it made itself distinctly unpopular.

But it did something far more important than that— it made the system better.

Because AIMS became the organisation that stood between the industry and poor decision-making. It became the body that would not accept substandard veterinary performance, inconsistent enforcement, or flawed interpretation of the rules.

It dealt with the reality on the ground—daily, practically, and effectively.

A Personal Perspective — From the Other Side of the Fence

And I say that with a degree of personal insight.

For 25 years, I stood on the other side of the fence, as Managing Director of Eville & Jones. I know, first-hand, the pressure that AIMS brought to bear.

When veterinary decisions were poor—AIMS challenged them.

When staff performance was inadequate—AIMS exposed it.

When enforcement was inconsistent or simply wrong—AIMS did not let it pass.

And because of that— we had to be better.
Not because we wished to be criticised, but because we could not afford not to be.

That is the value of a serious trade body.

Not one that nods along, but one that holds the system—*all parts of the system*—to account.

From Representation to Leadership

Over time, something important happened.

AIMS ceased to be a voice for a segment of the industry— and became the voice for the wider industry.

Today, AIMS represents the majority of the UK meat sector: red meat and white meat processors—from most major PLCs to almost all single-site operators, game meat businesses, catering butchers, wholesalers, and retailers, pet food manufacturers, renderers and animal by-product processors, and a wide range of ancillary and critical supply chain operators—from logistics and cold storage to cutting plants, service providers, and specialist processors.

This matters.

Because the meat industry is not a single point in the chain—it is an ecosystem.
Remove or weaken any part of it, and the whole system becomes vulnerable.

AIMS understands that—because it represents that.

This breadth of representation has not come by accident.

It has been earned - case by case, issue by issue, year after year.

When there is a problem, people come to AIMS— because they know it will be dealt with.

Leadership and Legacy

And at the centre of that journey is one individual. **Norman Bagley.**

A man of vision, persistence, and—when required—considerable steel.

He built this organisation into what it is today: not just a representative body, but a force.

And it has been my privilege to step in alongside him— not to replace that legacy – for that would not be possible - but to help carry it forward.

The greatest accolade I have received thus far is a senior FSA official saying, “bring back Norman...!”

The Strength of the Team

Because AIMS today is not just an idea—it is a team.

A team with experience across regulation, industry, policy, and enforcement.

A team that understands how the system works— and, more importantly, how it fails.

And let me say this plainly: There is nothing we will not take on in the pursuit of protecting this industry and ensuring that it can, not only survive— but grow.

A Body That Matches the Moment

Because in an environment such as this— with rising costs, regulatory dysfunction, and external pressures— the industry does not need a passive representative.

It needs an organisation prepared to lead.

Prepared to challenge. Prepared to act. Prepared to win.

That is what AIMS has become.

And that is what it will continue to be.

And now let us look at the Reality We Face

We are operating in an environment where the cost of regulation is rising sharply—yet the value derived from it is, at best, questionable.

Inspection charges continue to escalate at a rate that is simply unsustainable. Businesses—good businesses—are being pushed to the brink, not by market failure, but by regulatory burden.

And for what?

We are told this is about food safety. We are told this is about public health.

But when one examines the system objectively—clinically—the conclusion is unavoidable: The current model of meat inspection is not delivering what it purports to deliver.

It is outdated. It is inefficient. And in many respects, it is no longer scientifically defensible.

The Illusion of Control

At the same time, we see the continuation of veterinary export certification to the European Union—costing this industry in the region of £60 million per annum.

£60 million! For what is, in essence, the certification of compliance with standards we already meet.

This is not biosecurity. This is not risk management.

This is bureaucracy—profiteering in fact - pure and simple.

And now we are told that an SPS agreement may remove the need for this process.

If that is achieved—and it must be—then let us be honest: It will expose, beyond any doubt, that this entire edifice has been unnecessary from the outset.

Border Controls: Theatre, Not Science

We also see the expansion of border controls—controls that are presented as essential safeguards against disease incursion.

Yet the evidence tells a different story.

The actual risk of disease entering via legally traded, inspected product is vanishingly small. The checks themselves are inconsistent, poorly executed, and often little more than administrative exercises.

This is not a system designed around epidemiological risk. It is a system designed around political optics.

And the industry is paying for it.

The Decline of the State Veterinary Infrastructure

Perhaps more concerning still is the state of our national veterinary infrastructure.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency—once a cornerstone of disease surveillance and response—is now under-resourced, overstretched, and increasingly ineffective.

State veterinary laboratories—critical to our diagnostic capability—are, in many cases, in a woeful state of repair.

This is not a theoretical concern.

This is a real and present risk to the resilience of our food system.

Because while we expend vast sums on low-value inspection activity, we are simultaneously allowing the very systems that protect us from genuine threats to deteriorate.

A Disjointed and Hostile Operating Environment

Overlay this with: fragmented and inconsistent enforcement,

planning barriers that actively obstruct investment in infrastructure, and the growing influence of ideological activism – nay terrorism and we find ourselves in a position where the industry is not merely regulated— it is constrained, undermined, and, at times, openly targeted.

All of this against a backdrop of global instability, volatile supply chains, and increasing pressure on food security.

And Yet—We Endure

And yet— this industry endures.

Not because of the system that governs it, but despite it.

We produce some of the safest, highest-quality meat in the world. Our standards—on farm, in plant, across the supply chain—are second to none.

And that is not the result of bureaucracy.

It is the result of professionalism, expertise, and commitment—day in, day out—by the people in this room and those you represent.

What AIMS Is Doing

At AIMS, we have not stood idle in the face of these challenges.

We have taken action.

We are actively challenging the current charging regime through judicial review—because it is neither fair nor sustainable.

We are engaging directly with government to push for meaningful SPS alignment—removing unnecessary friction from trade.

We are exposing failures in border control systems and demanding accountability.

We are advancing the development of new assurance models—leveraging technology, data, and science to create a system that is fit for the 21st century.

Blockchain-enabled traceability. AI-driven inspection. Real-time risk analytics.

This is not theoretical. This is happening.

The Future: A System That Makes Sense

Let me set out, plainly, the vision.

A modern meat inspection system must be:

Risk-based, not ritualistic

Data-driven, not paper-driven

Outcome-focused, not process-obsessed

It must recognise that the greatest food safety gains are made not by inspecting the same carcass in the same way, day after day— but by identifying, in real time, where the risks actually lie.

It must move away from 19th-century inspection techniques and embrace 21st-century capability.

And crucially— it must be proportionate.

Because if regulation destroys the very businesses it seeks to regulate, then it has failed—utterly.

A Moment for Leadership

We stand at an inflection point.

The decisions taken in the next few years will determine whether this industry continues to thrive—or whether it is slowly regulated out of existence.

This is not a time for caution. It is a time for leadership. AIMS will lead. We will continue to challenge where challenge is required. We will continue to propose solutions—not just criticism. And we will continue to represent this industry—robustly, unapologetically, and without compromise.

Closing

Twenty-five years ago, AIMS was created in response to crisis.

Today, we are not merely responding.

We are shaping what comes next.

And let me leave you with this:

If we have the courage to confront failure, the discipline to apply science, and the resolve to demand better— then there is no reason why the UK meat industry should not be— the best, the most trusted, and the most advanced in the world.

Not by chance.

But by design.

Thank you.