



Regulations for Specific Products

Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, Goat and Other Meat

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Growing consumer demand for local, natural, grass-fed, and organic meat creates new opportunities for producers. However, selling USDA inspected meat is a significant challenge due to our state's limited local processing infrastructure. Selling beef, pork, lamb, and goat as "custom exempt" is a common option. To help producers navigate their options, this fact sheet includes:

- Meat processing overview;
- WSDA custom meat processing;
- USDA inspected meat sales;
- USDA inspected Mobile Slaughter Units;
- Exotic and game animals;
- Health Department Requirements for selling meat;
- USDA FSIS Retail Exemption;
- Food Storage Warehouse License; and
- Helpful resources on processing livestock.

Meat Processing Overview

Meat processing in the United States is regulated by the Federal Meat Inspection Act. This Act includes processing cattle, sheep, swine, and goats. In some situations, it also includes exotic animals, game animals and ostrich, emu, and rhea raised for meat. In order to meet the federal requirements, animals must be processed at plants inspected by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). However, it is difficult for many small producers to access these federally inspected plants. The other option for producers is to have your animals processed as "custom exempt" through the WSDA Custom Exempt Program, or through a WSDA Food Processor License for wild game and exotics (e.g. buffalo, beefalo, ostrich, emu, and rhea). Table 1 summarizes the key differences between what is allowed for custom exempt and USDA inspected meat. Table 2 summarizes the key differences between what is allowed for a WSDA Food Processor and USDA inspected meat.

TABLE 1. WSDA CUSTOM EXEMPT AND USDA INSPECTED MEAT

Species: cattle, sheep, swine, and goats	WSDA Custom Exempt	USDA Inspected Facility
What can be sold?	1/8, quarter, half, or whole animal*	whole, primal, or meat processed into cuts
Marketing options?	direct to end consumer only	direct, retail and wholesale
Are out-of-state sales allowed?	No	Yes

*Can go lower than 1/8 as long as paperwork supports it being owned by each of the owner's before slaughter.

TABLE 2. WSDA FOOD PROCESSOR AND USDA INSPECTED MEAT

Including: buffalo, beefalo, ostrich, emu, and rhea	WSDA Food Processor	USDA Inspected Facility
What can be sold?	whole, primal, or meat processed into cuts	whole, primal, or meat processed into cuts
Marketing options?	direct, retail and wholesale	direct, retail and wholesale
Are out-of-state sales allowed?	No	Yes

WSDA Custom Exempt Meat Processing

The “custom exempt” meat processing allows producers to sell animals by live weight directly to the end consumer prior to slaughter (i.e., when they are still alive). Under custom exempt processing, cattle, swine, sheep and goat are sold as a whole, half, quarter, eighth or smaller (as long as paperwork supports it being owned by each of the owners before slaughter) for the sole consumption of the owner. Meat is “uninspected” and cannot be resold. Selling meat by the piece is not allowed under custom exempt. All sales, slaughter, and cut and wrap must occur in Washington State.

Custom meat animals are required to be slaughtered by people licensed by the WSDA Custom Meat Program. The slaughter may occur on the farm where the animal was raised, if the licensed “custom farm slaughter” has a WSDA licensed custom meat truck. Animals may also be processed at a fixed slaughter facility licensed by WSDA to slaughter meat food animals for the owner (also known as a “Custom Slaughter Establishment”). Carcasses are tagged and delivered to a WSDA licensed Custom Meat Facility for cutting and wrapping, aging, and freezing. Individual customers wanting specific cuts must call this facility with directions on how to cut the carcass. Customers also make arrangements to pick up their meat at the Custom Meat Facility.

Custom slaughtered meat is “uninspected” because it is not processed in a USDA inspected facility. All packaged meat must be labeled “not for sale.” Only the owner of the animal (i.e., the meat customer), their immediate family and/or non-paying guests can consume it. Custom exempt meat cannot be sold at farmers markets, to restaurants, or to grocery stores. Likewise, it cannot be donated to food banks.

Producers are advised to schedule butcher dates well in advance with their custom farm slaughterer, especially during the busy season (August through November). In addition, producers need to ensure that space will be available for their animals at the cut and wrap facility on the day of slaughter.

For a list of WSDA licensed custom slaughter and custom meat processing facilities, contact Food Safety by calling (360) 902-1876 or email at foodsafety@agr.wa.gov. Additional information is also available at www.agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/CustomMeats. At the time of printing, WSDA licensees included:

- 72 Custom Farm Slaughterers;
- 17 Custom Slaughter Establishments (fixed facility); and

- 103 Custom Meat Facilities (cut and wrap).

USDA Inspected Meat Sales

USDA inspection is required to sell meat from livestock and animal products (as opposed to live animals) through retail outlets, by the cut, or across state lines. Producers must have the animals slaughtered and processed in USDA inspected facilities. Some facilities require a minimum head number or work only on contract, and many process only beef. The major benefit of meat processed at USDA inspected facilities is that it may be sold at farmers markets, to restaurants and to other wholesale and retail outlets. Only USDA inspected red meat can be sold in retail or wholesale markets.

For information regarding USDA Inspected facilities in the Pacific Northwest, contact the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service District Office (for Washington State) in Denver, Colorado at (303) 236-9800 or visit www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/mpi-directory.

USDA Inspected Mobile Slaughter Units

Given the limited USDA inspected meat processing facilities available, USDA Inspected Mobile Slaughter Units¹ (MSUs) provide a processing alternative, especially for small and/or independent producers. Carcasses processed in a MSU are required to be taken to a USDA inspected cut and wrap facility for cutting, aging, and packaging. As the USDA Inspected MSU meets all of the requirements of a USDA fixed plant, meat processed in a MSU may be sold through retail outlets, by the cut, or across state lines. One of the key differences with a MSU is that animals are slaughtered on farm, eliminating the need to transport them to a fixed USDA slaughter facility.

USDA Inspected MSUs in Washington

Island Grown Farmers Co-op (IGFC) provides USDA inspected mobile animal slaughter services to co-op members in San Juan, Whatcom, Skagit, Island and Snohomish counties. Cut and wrap, storage and some retail sales services are provided at IGFC's USDA inspected facility in Bow. For more information visit www.igfcmcats.com, call (360) 766-4273, or email info@igfcmcats.com.

The **Puget Sound Meat Producers Cooperative** is a non-profit cooperative of local ranchers, farmers, butchers, restaurant owners and others that operate a USDA inspected Mobile Meat Processing Unit (MMPU) serving Pierce, King, Kitsap, Thurston, Lewis, Mason, Clallam, Jefferson, and Grays Harbor counties. They offer slaughter at four locations: Puyallup, Port Orchard, McKenna, and Bothell. It is also certified organic and can process organic beef, pork, and sheep. For more information, visit www.pugetsoundmeat.com, call (253) 278-3609 or email psmpc@pugetsoundmeat.com.

The Community Agriculture Development Center contracts with **S & K Processing** in Chewelah to run their USDA inspected meat processor. Their mobile processing unit is parked onsite at **Smokey Ridge Meats**. Together, these two businesses provide USDA inspected animal slaughter and a

¹ MSUs are also referred to as Mobile Processing Units (MPUs) or Mobile Meat Processing Units (MMPUs).

convenient USDA inspected cut and wrap facility. Call Shane Nelson (509) 675-6071 for more information or visit <http://communityagcenter.org/processing/livestock-unit>.

The national Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network (NMPAN) is an excellent resource for learning more about MSUs: <http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/mobile-unit-overview>.

Exotic and Game Animals

Exotic animal meat (e.g., buffalo, beefalo, ostrich, emu, and rhea) can be sold within Washington State when slaughtered and processed at a WSDA Food Processing facility or at a USDA inspected plant. To sell exotic animal meat outside Washington State, animals must be processed at a facility that has a USDA grant of inspection for that particular species.

A licensed WSDA Food Processing facility can process hunters' game animals for the sole use of the hunter's family or guests. This meat cannot be sold. A licensed WSDA custom meat facility can also be licensed as a WSDA food processor.

Elk and deer farms are not allowed in the state of Washington. The Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife prohibits the transport of elk and deer into Washington for processing.

Health Department Requirements for Selling Meat

Livestock producers who are direct marketing will need to find out what permits are required by the local health jurisdiction where they will be selling meat. If you are selling in Seattle, you will need to check with Seattle-King County Public Health; in Tacoma, it is Tacoma-Pierce County Public Health. In Spokane, it is the Spokane Regional Health District. In most areas, the local jurisdiction will be the county health department. In all, there are 37 local health jurisdictions in Washington: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions.aspx>.

While all local health jurisdictions adopt the same "Washington State Retail Food Code," how the permitting structure, fees and inspections are set up vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In addition, the local health jurisdiction may add requirements beyond the Retail Food Code. Typically, the food permits are in the environmental health division of the health department.

Farmers Markets and Farm Stands

The local health jurisdiction permits and inspects farmers markets and farm stands. Only USDA inspected beef, pork, lamb and goat OR exotic meat (see Table 2 above) slaughtered and processed at a WSDA Food Processing facility or at a USDA inspected plant can be sold at farmers markets, farm stands, and other retail outlets.

Producers should check with the farmers market manager and/or health department early on to find out what is required. Questions to ask your local health jurisdiction include:

- What permit(s) are required for producers to sell meat at farmers market. In Seattle-King County, a "Limited Farmers Market Temporary Permit" is required.
- Are fresh meat sales allowed? Or does all meat need to be frozen?
- What temperature needs to be maintained?

- Can producers use coolers or is mechanical refrigeration required? If refrigeration or a freezer is needed, be sure to ask the market manager about the electricity and voltage available at the market site.
- Is a separate permit required for each market site or each day?
- How much does the permit cost? They may range significantly, anywhere from \$25.00 to \$600 per season.
- When are permits due or required to be renewed?

USDA FSIS Retail Exemption

This exemption allows for a meat processing facility in your own retail store. A Retail Food Establishment Permit must be obtained from your local health jurisdiction. You will still need to have USDA inspected slaughter for all of the meat, but once the carcass is stamped, you can cut and wrap the meat and sell it directly to consumers by the cut in your store and at two other retail locations such as a farmers market or farm stand. There are many parameters for what meets or does not meet this exemption. In order to meet the USDA FSIS Retail Exemption, you will need to:

1. Own the facility or pay for the facility's usage.
2. Not have more than two markets open at the same time.
3. Have USDA inspected slaughter for all of the meat.
4. Be permitted as a Retail Food Establishment.

In addition, there are limits to how many pounds of each meat animal species you can sell to a customer in one day. Please see Table 3 for the limit by species.

TABLE 3. LIMITS ON POUNDS PER SPECIES PER CUSTOMER PER DAY

Species	Pounds
Cattle	300
Calves	37.5
Sheep	27.5
Swine	100
Goats	25

Where and How You Can Sell

A retail-exempt processor can have a permanent retail store and also sell at a *daily* farmers market or at a roadside stand or truck.

In addition, a retail-exempt processor can have a permanent retail store and also sell to food service at schools, hospitals, restaurants, caterers, and hotels (food service sales may not exceed 25% of your total sales). However, there are three additional conditions:

1. The retail-exempt processor's total sales to food service do not exceed FSIS's annual dollar limitations for retail sales found within the federal register at www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FRPubs/2007-0009.pdf.
2. The retail-exempt processor's total sales to food service do not exceed 25% of their total annual sale; and
3. The retail-exempt processor only sells fresh (not frozen or dried) products.

Food Storage Warehouse License

To commercially store foods, including meat, a Food Storage Warehouse License is required. The warehouse can be an acceptable building, with a freezer or refrigerator. Freezers or refrigerators storing your household products are not allowed. However, household and commercial units used solely for your business are allowed. The warehouse must not be located in a domestic kitchen. However, it may be located in an area used only for food storage warehouse activities such as an out building or specific areas in an outbuilding. The warehouse is subject to inspection.

The Food Storage Warehouse License enables farmers to store USDA inspected meat for later sale. It also allows farmers to rent refrigerator or freezer space to consumers for products that require substantial freezer space or cold storage. The Food Storage Warehouse License costs \$50 per year, expiring on March 31 of each year. Applications are available online at:

www.agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/FoodStorage/docs/ApplicationForFoodStorageWarehouseLicense.pdf

For more information, please call (360) 902-2095 or email foodsafety@agr.wa.gov.

Helpful Resources on Processing Livestock

- Beef and Pork Whole Animal Buying Guide (Iowa State University): <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/ItemDetail.aspx?ProductID=13056>
- Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network: www.nichemeatprocessing.org
- Resource Guide to Direct Marketing Livestock and Poultry (Cornell University): <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/resource-guide-to-direct-marketing-livestock-and-poultry>
- Washington State University Small Farms: www.smallfarms.wsu.edu/animals
- WSDA Farm Wisdom Video Series on “Small-scale USDA Inspected Meat Processing”: <http://agr.wa.gov/marketing/smallfarm/managerisk.aspx>

Recommended Fact Sheets

- 21. Food Product Recalls
- 35. Selling and Processing Poultry
- 36. Selling Rabbit Meat

For further information, to provide comments, or suggest a resource to add to this fact sheet, please email smallfarms@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-2888.