

There is a growing demand for “niche meats” which creates new opportunities for producers who raise natural, pastured or grass-fed, organic, or local meat. Unfortunately, accessing meat processing facilities and selling meat can be a significant challenge.

In this fact sheet you will find information on:

- meat processing overview;
- WSDA custom meat processing;
- USDA inspected meat sales;
- USDA inspected mobile processing units;
- exotic and game animals;
- Health Department Rules for selling meat at farmers markets or farm stands; and
- Food Storage Warehouse License.

Please see “Poultry Processing and Marketing Regulations” fact sheet for information on poultry meat and processing options, including large birds such as ostrich and rheas.

Meat Processing Overview

Meat processing in the United States is regulated by the Federal Meat Inspection Act. This Act covers processing cattle, sheep, swine, and goats and in some situations 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). Unfortunately, it is difficult for small producers to access these federally inspected plants. The other option is to have your animals processed by utilizing a WSDA licensed Custom Meat Slaughter and Processing Facility, also known as “custom exempt.”

	WSDA Custom Exempt	USDA FSIS Inspected Facility
What can be sold	quarter, half, or whole animal	whole, primal, or processed into cuts
Marketing options	direct to end consumer only	direct and retail
Sales allowed outside of Washington?	NO	YES

WSDA Custom Exempt Meat Processing

The WSDA Custom Meat Program licenses persons that slaughter or process uninspected meat animals for the sole consumption of the owner. In order to meet this requirement, producers sell live animals by weight (live weight) directly to the end consumer. Animals are generally sold in whole, halves, or quarters. The producer contracts with a WSDA licensed custom slaughterer (mobile truck or fixed facility) for on farm kill of the animal already sold.

Be sure to get your butcher dates well in advance to secure your slaughterer and to ensure there is space at the cut and wrap facility on the same day. August through December is a butcher’s busiest season.

Once clean, the carcass is tagged and delivered to a WSDA licensed custom meat facility for aging, cutting and wrapping, and freezing. Individual customers must call the facility with directions on how to cut the carcass. Customers make arrangements to pick up their meat.

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

For a list of WSDA licensed custom slaughter and custom meat processing facilities visit WSDA Food Safety Program at <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/CustomMeats/> or email foodsafety@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-1876.

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 retail outlets.

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

USDA Inspected Mobile Processing Units

USDA Inspected Mobile Processing Units (MPU) meet all of the requirements of a USDA fixed plant and the meat may be sold through retail outlets, by the cut, or across state lines. The difference is that animals are slaughtered on farm, reducing the need to transport them to a slaughter facility. USDA Inspected MPU's can provide processing where fixed facilities are not available to small or non-contracted farmers. Carcasses are then taken to a USDA inspected fixed facility for aging, cutting and packaging.

Washington currently has four red meat MPUs in operation.

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

The **Puget Sound Meat Producers Cooperative** is a non-profit cooperative of local ranchers, farmers, butchers, restaurant owners and others that operates a USDA-inspected MPU serving King, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pierce, Thurston and Clallam Counties. For more information, visit www.psmc.com, email psmpc@pugetsoundmeat.org or call (253) 278.3609.

Smokey Ridge Meats in Chewelah is also a USDA Processor. The Community Agriculture Development Center owns a USDA stationary mobile processing unit where animals can be slaughtered and then processed at Smokey Ridge meats which is USDA inspected.

Thundering Hooves has a privately owned MPU that serves the Walla Walla area. For more information, visit www.thunderinghooves.net/meats/processing.htm or contact them via email info@thunderinghooves.net or by calling (866) 350-9400.

Exotic and Game Animals

Exotic animal meat (e.g. buffalo or game animals) can be sold within Washington State when slaughtered and processed at a WSDA Custom Exempt Meat 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.

Hunters' game animals can be custom processed by a licensed WSDA Custom Exempt Meat Processing facility. They cannot be sold.

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

Pigeons (squab) are considered "poultry" under the jurisdiction of USDA Meat Inspection Program. WSDA has jurisdiction under Custom Meat only where the bird is slaughtered and processed in a custom meat facility and then returned to the owner of the animal.

Rabbits can be processed at WSDA licensed poultry processing facilities. See the Poultry Fact Sheet for more information.

Health Department Rules for Selling Meat at Farmers Markets or Farm Stands

Only USDA inspected meat can be sold at farmers markets, farm stands or restaurants.

In addition, the local health department sets the rules for selling retail meat and poultry products at farmers markets and farm stands in their jurisdiction. Rules vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Some health departments allow fresh meat sales (chicken or red meat) if it is under mechanical refrigeration held at 38° F or below. Some allow only frozen products in coolers that maintain solid frozen product at markets. Both options require producers to have permits from the local health department.

Be aware that some health departments require separate permits for each market site or each day. Health Department permits range can from \$25.00 per season to \$600 per season. Check with the health department early on to find out what options are available and the associated costs because permitting can take time.

All farmers markets will require that producers have the proper state and local licenses and permits to sell products. In addition, ask the market manager about the electricity and voltage availability before buying an electrical refrigeration unit.

To find one of the more than 140 member markets of the Washington State Farmers Market Association go to www.wafarmersmarkets.com or call (206) 706-5198.

Food Storage Warehouse License

To commercially store perishable foods, such as meat, a Food Storage Warehouse License is needed for your facility. This facility can be a separate freezer or refrigerator (not your household freezer) and must be located away from a domestic kitchen, such as in a barn or garage. Temperature logs must be maintained and the facility is subject to inspection.

This license enables farmers to store USDA meats for later sale. It also allows farmers to provide a service to customers and lease refrigerator or freezer space to consumers for items that require substantial storage space. This license is \$50.00 annually and expires on March 31 of each year.

For more information call (360) 902-2095, email foodsafety@agr.wa.gov or download an application at: <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/FoodStorage/docs/ApplicationForFoodStorageWarehouseLicense.pdf>.

Recommended Fact Sheet: Poultry Processing and Marketing Regulations

For further assistance or to make suggestions on how to improve this fact sheet, please email smallfarms@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-2057 or (360) 676-2059.