



Publication FST-327NP

What do I need to know to sell MEAT AND POULTRY at the farmers market?

Increasingly, producers want to sell meat at farmers markets. This is a great venue to sell your product at a premium, but there are specific and strict regulations that need to be adhered to. This document will provide information on how to meet the regulatory guidelines associated with selling meat and poultry at your local farmers market.

What inspection is required if I want to sell meat and poultry at the farmers market?

The sale of almost all meat requires inspection depending on the animal the meat is harvested from. In general, meat is categorized as one of the following:

1. Meat from amenable species
2. Poultry
3. Meat from non-amenable species
4. Meat from exotic species

All have slightly different regulations. Some farmers markets have their own specific requirements. Contact your farmers market's manager for more specific requirements.

If you want to sell meat in Virginia, your first contact should be the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Office of Meat and Poultry Services (VDACS-OMPS; VDACS 2019b)

Meat From Amenable Species

Amenable livestock species include cattle, swine, sheep, and goats. Federal or state inspection is required for all meat products derived from these species and must be produced in an inspected facility. Common meat cuts that may be sold at a farmers market include steaks, ground meat, and sausages.

Meat From Poultry

Federal or state inspection is also required for all amenable poultry (e.g. turkeys, chickens, ducks, geese, squab, guinea fowl, and raites) unless a producer utilizes an exemption from inspection. Two available exemptions are as follows (USDA 2006):

1. If you slaughter/process no more than 1,000 birds per year for sale, you may be exempt from inspection. This exemption is part of the Poultry Product Inspection Act (USDA 2006). If desired, you can request a letter from VDACS-OMPS stating that you are participating in the exemption for no more than 1,000 birds. Some farmers markets require a letter of exemption. Please check with the market manager. To qualify for this exemption, you must meet the following criteria:
 - Slaughter no more than 1,000 healthy birds per calendar year.
 - Only buy/sell poultry products raised/slaughtered/processed on your own farm.
 - Slaughter/process using sanitary facilities, practices, and procedures fit for human food.
 - Keep records that meet the standards outlined in Title 9, CFR 381175 (CFR 2019).
 - Only sell within your own state (products may not cross state lines).
2. If you slaughter/process between 1,001 to 20,000 poultry/year, you can be exempt from inspection if you apply for a poultry permit of exemption from VDACS-OMPS (VDACS 2017). OMPS will inspect facilities on an annual basis. During inspection, it is required that you show proof of a current certification of potable water supply, recordkeeping, evidence of healthy birds, and a sanitation program.

"This work is supported by Food Safety Outreach Program [grant no. 2016 0020-25888/project accession no. 1010671] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture"



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2019

Publication FST-327NP (FST-451NP)



Meat From Non-amenable Species

Non-amenable species include— but are not limited to —rabbit, reindeer, elk, domesticated deer, antelope, water buffalo, bison, etc.

Non-amenable species do not require slaughtering /processing under inspection to be sold as meat at a farmers market. However, they must be correctly labeled and stored at refrigeration temperatures (41°F/5°C).

Virginia has the Virginia Rabbit Program, which provides inspection at no cost. Only domesticated rabbits can be sold for meat. Rabbits harvested through hunting are not allowed to be sold.

If you are interested in selling rabbit meat, your first point of contact should be the Virginia Rabbit Program. Permit application and more information about the Virginia Rabbit Program can be found online (VDACS, n.d.). If you apply for and acquire a permit, a primary inspection will be conducted before beginning operations. Inspections, thereafter, will be periodic and random (annually). Slaughter locations and conditions must comply with Virginia Food Laws (Code of Virginia 2019) and good manufacturing practices outlined in CFR Title 21, Part 110 (CFR 2019). Permit application must be renewed annually. However, if you plan to sell rabbit meat across state lines, you are required to be inspected by the FDA or under voluntary inspection (for a fee) from VDACS-OMPS or the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS).

- You can request voluntary, fee-based USDA-FSIS or VDACS inspections for the following other meat products:
- Products from non-amenable species (e.g. reindeer, elk, deer, antelope, water buffalo, or bison).
- Poultry (if slaughtering fewer than 20,000 poultry carcasses/year).
- Migratory waterfowl or game birds.

Meat From Exotic Species

Exotic species include iguana, guinea pig, turtles, alligators, frogs, etc. These products do not fall under USDA and/or state jurisdiction. Inspection of exotic animals is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration; inspection of meat from exotic species is not required. However, facilities slaughtering and processing exotic meats need to be registered as food processing establishments with the FDA; these facilities must also follow good management practices outlined in Title 21, CFR 110 (CFR 2019). If desired, you can request a voluntary, fee-based inspection of your facilities from the USDA. Additionally, if you are not slaughtering but purchasing exotic meat for further processing or sale, the product must come from an approved source. You must also confirm that the exotic animal is not on the endangered species list.

Who conducts inspections?

Slaughtering and processing of amenable species and poultry (that doesn’t have an exemption) must be done at a USDA- or state-inspected facility. You cannot slaughter and/or process these animals at your home or farm and sell them. Depending on the

state, the inspected facility could have either federal USDA-FSIS inspectors or inspectors from state departments of agriculture’s Office of Meat and Poultry Services on site. In Virginia, these facilities are primarily inspected by the VDACS-OMPS. If you request a voluntary, fee-based inspection from the USDA for non-amenable or exotic animals, it will likely be conducted by VDACS-OMPS.

Do I need to apply for a Meat and Poultry Handlers Permit?

Anyone selling meat and poultry products (regardless of animal species) can request a Meat and Poultry Handlers Permit (VDACS 2019a). These permits are required by VDACS for vendors reselling meat and poultry products slaughtered and processed at an inspected facility, however some farmers markets require them for all meat and poultry vendors. To receive a permit, you must register your business with the state. There is no registration fee, and the permits are issued for a three-year period. To register for and receive a permit, the OMPS enforcement officer will inspect your facility to ensure that you meet the requirements:

- Properly Maintain facilities, storage, and transportation, and products handled to prevent unsanitary conditions, contamination, and/or adulteration.
- Have measures in place to control rodents and pests.
- Label products in accordance with regulations (9 CFR, Part 317).
- Prevent packaged products from being opened, relabeled, or further processed (no further processing).
- Keep clear records of transactions, shipping, and receiving. These must include: (a) name or description, (b) net weight, (c) name and address of buyer or receiver, and (d) shipment method, date, and name/address of carrier.

Can I sell meat harvested from hunting?

No, you cannot sell wild game in Virginia.

What are some important considerations for selling meat products at the farmers market?

1. ALL meat destined for sale MUST be slaughtered and inspected according to federal/state regulations as previously described.
2. All meat and poultry products must be labelled clearly and include:
 - Product name
 - Inspection legend. All meat and poultry products that are handled and inspected are assigned a specific USDA mark of inspection and establishment (EST) number. The EST number is the establishment number of the slaughter or processing facility; it is used for traceability purposes. The EST number is strictly controlled and can only be added to the label by the establishment handling your meat (fig.



- Net weight.
- Ingredient statement.
- List of allergens.
- Name and address of the manufacturer or the responsible party.
- Safe handling instructions – statement for raw and partially cooked products. This **must** include: keep meat/poultry refrigerated/frozen, specific storage instructions, and suggested preparing instructions (fig. 2).
- The statement “**Keep Refrigerated**” or “**Keep Frozen**” should be prominently displayed on the label.

For more details, please refer to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Services webpage, “Meat and Poultry Labeling Terms” (USDA 2015).



Figure 1. Example of an inspection legend. (Image courtesy of the USDA)

SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

THIS PRODUCT WAS PREPARED FROM INSPECTED AND PASSED MEAT AND/OR POULTRY. SOME FOOD PRODUCTS MAY CONTAIN BACTERIA THAT COULD CAUSE ILLNESS IF THE PRODUCT IS MISHANDLED OR COOKED IMPROPERLY. FOR YOUR PROTECTION, FOLLOW THESE SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS.



KEEP REFRIGERATED OR FROZEN. THAW IN REFRIGERATOR OR MICROWAVE.



KEEP RAW MEAT AND POULTRY SEPARATE FROM OTHER FOODS. WASH WORKING SURFACES (INCLUDING CUTTING BOARDS), UTENSILS, AND HANDS AFTER TOUCHING RAW MEAT OR POULTRY.



COOK THOROUGHLY.



KEEP HOT FOOD HOT. REFRIGERATE LEFTOVERS IMMEDIATELY OR DISCARD.

Figure 2. Example of a safe handling instructions label. This label is available for your use. (Image by Lily Yang).

What are the most important food safety steps I need to consider when preparing my meat and poultry product?

Most raw and cooked meat and poultry products are considered time- and temperature-controlled for safety (TCS) foods. This means that they require time and temperature control to ensure safety. Improper storage and handling of TCS foods can promote the growth of pathogens like Salmonella and Escherichia coli. All TCS meats should be (40°F/4°C) or in frozen (e.g., frozen solid).

How should I store/sell my meat and poultry products at the market?

Mechanical refrigerators are the best way to control product temperature. However, coolers with ice and ice packs are another option. Regardless of the method that you choose to keep your meat or poultry products cold, you must be able to control and monitor the temperature. A calibrated thermometer should be used to verify that the food is maintained at or below 40°F/4°C. If you are using ice to keep your meat products cold, the following requirements should be met:

- Ice and meat should be kept in such a way that the water from melting ice drains away from the product.
- Packaging and product will not be damaged by ice contact.



Additional Resources

- Boyer, Renee, and Joell Eifert. 2018. *Going to Market: A Guide to Selling Raw, Processed and Prepared Food Products From Your Home, at Farmers Markets, Stores & Roadside Stands*. Virginia Cooperative Extension publication FST-273NP. www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ANR/ANR-46/ANR-46.html.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2018. *FSIS Guideline for Determining Whether a Livestock Slaughter or Processing Firm Is Exempt From the Inspection Requirements of the Federal Meat Inspection Act*. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/16a88254-adc5-48fb-b24c-3ea0b133c939/Compliance-Guideline-Livestock-Exemptions.pdf?MOD=AJPERES.
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