
Frequently Asked Questions about
**Processing and Marketing Beef,
Pork, Lamb and Goat Meats**
In North Carolina and South Carolina



Photo: Robert Campbell



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Susan Jelinek Mellage
October 2006



NC *Choices*

About Heifer International

Founded in 1944, Heifer International is a humanitarian assistance organization that works to end world hunger and protect the earth. Through livestock, training and "passing on the gift," Heifer has helped seven million families in more than 125 countries improve their quality of life and move toward greater self-reliance. The Appalachian-Southeastern Region works to promote a just food system throughout Appalachia and the southeastern United States.

Heifer International
Appalachian-Southeastern Office
212 South Broad St., Ste C
Brevard, NC 28712
(828) 862-5534

About CFSA

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association is a membership-based organization of more than 900 farmers, processors, gardeners, businesses and individuals in North and South Carolina who are committed to sustainable agriculture and the development of locally-based, organic food systems. For 25 years, CFSA has provided support of local and organic food systems through promotion and marketing assistance; education and advocacy efforts; and information sharing/networking. They can be reached online at www.carolinafarmstewards.org or through their state office.

CFSA North Carolina
P.O. Box 448
Pittsboro, NC 27312
(919) 542-2402

About NC Choices

NC Choices (www.ncchoices.com) is a project of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (www.cefs.ncsu.edu) and is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. NC Choices brings together a variety of partners, including farmers, meat processors, environmental organizations and research and extension personnel to promote local, sustainable and compassionate pork production. NC Choices is dedicated to educating consumers, providing technical information and resources for outdoor, pasture-based pork producers, enhancing opportunities for small-scale value-added meat processing, and developing direct market opportunities.

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This document is available online at www.carolinafarmstewards.org and at www.ncchoices.com.

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Introduction

With a background in Horticulture, I was surprised to find myself working with livestock farmers just after graduate school as the project manager for NC Choices at the Center for Environmental Farming Systems at NC State University. The sale of meats brings a new level of regulatory oversight and red tape that is just not found in the produce marketplace. I was met with many specific questions from farmers regarding what was allowed and what was not when it came to selling their meats. I quickly realized I needed a crash course on the world of meat regulation. Thanks to many progressive farmers and the helpful staff of the NC Meat and Poultry Inspection Office, I was soon able to tackle most of the questions thrown my way. When Heifer International and the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association expressed their interest in developing a manual for farmers, I jumped at the chance.

This document is intended to act as a guide for farmers who want to begin selling their own red meats. Red meats are considered to include pork, beef, lamb, and goat's meat. The guide may also be used as a general reference for poultry and rabbits slaughtered and processed at a federally– or state-inspected slaughter facility, but not for products from poultry or rabbits slaughtered on-farm. Please reference the poultry resource section on page 29 for more information regarding on-farm poultry and rabbit slaughter and sale.

The frequently-asked-question format was chosen to give accurate and straightforward answers to the most common questions farmers have, but it is also meant to be a starting point. Develop good relationships with your state and federal meat regulators and your processor. They will be your best guide as you start to sell meats from your farm.

Raleigh, NC
October 2006

Notice of Disclaimer

All efforts were made to provide accurate and precise information pertaining to the laws and regulations surrounding the sale of red meats in NC and SC. Due to the changing nature of the regulatory system, it is important to verify the accuracy of these statements with the responsible regulatory agency.

Production

What are the rules about bringing live animals in and out of the state?

Farmers may want to bring in livestock or breeding stock to their farm from another state. Regulation of the movement of live animals in and out of the state is controlled by the Office of the State Veterinarian. In general, to bring livestock into or out of the state, the animal(s) must have a valid health certificate which shows that the animal has been inspected by a permitted vet and is not infected with nor has come into contact with animals carrying a communicable disease. Contact your local large animal vet or the Office of the State Veterinarian for more information on how to obtain a certificate of vet inspection.

Need to Contact your State Veterinarian?

In NC: (919) 733-7601

In SC: (803) 788-8747

If I am taking my animals across state lines to a processor, do I need to get a certificate of veterinary inspection?

No. If you are taking animals across state lines for immediate slaughter (or to visit a veterinarian), you are not required to get a certificate of veterinary inspection.

What environmental programs are available to me from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)?

To encourage farmers to use best management practices on their farms, local offices of the NRCS and SWCD offer many types of environmental programs that provide cost-sharing or training opportunities. Many farmers have been provided with financial assistance to fence livestock out of waterways and to dig wells for watering systems. Others have expanded buffer strips around waterways, adopted controlled rotational grazing systems, and provided more wildlife habitat through these programs. Call your local county or regional offices to learn more about these opportunities. Don't forget! Your customers care about your environmental stewardship - be sure to let them know that you participate in these programs!

What is the National Animal Identification System (NAIS)?

NAIS is a state-federal-industry partnership that aims to expand animal identification throughout the country in order to find and track animals or farms that have come into direct contact with a livestock disease. The program works by identifying premises with livestock, identifying individual animals, and tracking these animals from location to location. As of Fall 2006, the program is voluntary; however the USDA is moving to make this program mandatory in the future.

Want to Learn More about NAIS?
Visit <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais>
Or Call (301) 734-7255
or visit
<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/nais.html>

What are animal welfare and environmental certification programs?

What are their benefits?

There are several organizations around the country who provide guidelines on how animals should be raised to maximize animal welfare and protect the environment. Guidelines can range from how the animals are fed and sheltered to how they are transported or slaughtered. Some also include guidelines on how animals are grazed or how streams and ponds are buffered from run-off. Some farmers choose to certify with these organizations in order to more easily explain how their animals are raised and to give their customers confidence that they are raising animals humanely or in ways that protect the environment. Some organizations provide certification for free, but others charge a fee. Organizations will require a visit to your farm on a regular basis to verify your practices. To find out more about these organizations, turn to the Animal Welfare and Environmental Certification Agencies Resource Section on page 30 .



Photo: Robert Campbell

How can I improve my production and utilize best management practices on my farm?

Your local county livestock extension agent is your best resource when it comes to improving your production and utilizing best management practices on your land. Develop a good relationship with your agent. Invite them to your farm for a tour. Talk with them about your future plans. Work together through on-farm demonstrations or research projects. See the Livestock Production Resources section on page 28 for more information.

How can I find organic feeds? If I want to raise my own organic feeds, where can I find more information?

The demand for certified organic feeds in NC and SC has grown over recent years, as more farmers are looking to feed them to their livestock. Many choose organic feeds because they want to support other farmers using sustainable practices and because they want to be able to further differentiate their product in the marketplace. Luckily, more NC and SC farmers are choosing to raise feed grains organically and larger quantities are available in the marketplace. The price of these feeds can be significantly more than conventional feed grains, so many farmers are also looking to grow their own.

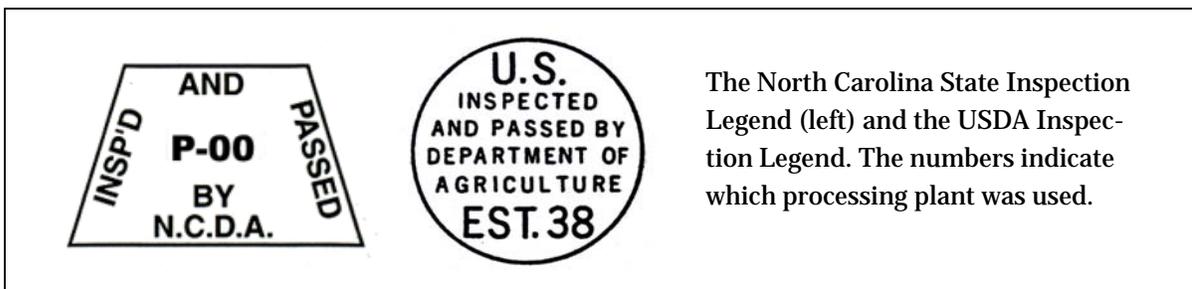
Since 2004, the North Carolina Organic Grain Project has worked to support organic grain farmers with production and marketing support. They also link livestock producers with grain farmers and feed mills who sell organic grains. Some information may be available for SC farmers who live near the NC border.

**Want to raise organic grains or
find an organic grains distributor?
Visit the North Carolina Organic Grains Project
www.cropsci.ncsu.edu/organicgrains
or call (828) 628-2675.**

USDA vs. State Meat Inspection

What is the difference between a federally- and state-inspected plant? How does the inspection affect where and to whom I sell meats?

State and federally inspected processing plants follow the same guidelines to ensure that meat is wholesome and safe for consumption. The main difference is that, by law, state-inspected meats can only be sold within the state. This means that you may not cross state lines, sell these meats online, mail or in any other way ship them out of state. State inspected meat and poultry products bear a state inspection legend and federally-inspected meat bears a USDA inspection legend.



Legislation Update

As of Fall 2006, lawmakers in the US Congress are working to allow the sale of state-inspected meats over state lines, but this law has not been passed. To read more about this effort, call the Offices of Senator Orrin Hatch (Utah) or Senator Kent Conrad (North Dakota) at (202) 224-3121 or visit: http://hatch.senate.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=1595

What is a TA plant?

“TA” refers to the Talmadge-Aiken Act of 1962, a law passed to help coordinate state and federal food safety guidelines. This law allows trained inspectors that are state employees to staff meat packing plants with USDA inspection privileges. A “TA plant” is a “federally-inspected” plant, which means that meats from this facility bear the USDA Inspection Legend and can be sold across state lines.

Will my customers care if it is federally-inspected or state-inspected meat?

Your customers might ask what the difference is between state- and federally-inspected meats. You can confidently tell them that the safety standards are the same and that they can be sure that the meats they are buying are safe to eat. The kind of plant you use only affects where you can sell or ship your meats.

What is a “custom slaughter” facility?

A custom slaughter facility is a slaughter and processing facility that does not have a state or federally inspector on duty and therefore the meats from these facilities are not considered state- or federally-inspected meats. These establishments are regularly inspected for overall sanitation, but the animals themselves are not inspected for disease. Custom slaughter operations are typically thought to process deer meat for hunters, but they offer services for people who want any animal slaughtered or processed for their own personal use. The meat is cut, packaged, and labeled “not for sale.” These meats are returned to the owner of the animal and cannot be sold.

Want to find a processor near you?

See Find a Processor Near You on Page 32

On-farm Animal Slaughter and Processing

Can I slaughter my animals myself?

Yes. You can slaughter animals that you have raised on your farm as long as the meat is for your family's own personal use or the use of non-paying guests. You may not sell meat from animals you have slaughtered on your farm. You must use a state– or federally- inspected slaughter facility to sell meats.

You may sell meats from rabbits or poultry that you have slaughtered, processed, packaged, and labeled yourself. There are specific rules and guidelines that need to be followed in order to process and sell your own poultry. Please Poultry Resources on page 29 for more information.

Can I sell a live animal to a customer and slaughter “their animal” myself as a service on my farm?

No! Some farmers have attempted to go around laws about selling meats from animals they have slaughtered themselves by “selling a customer a live animal” and then slaughtering that animal “as a service.” If you slaughter animals for other individuals on your property, without first building an inspected slaughter facility, you are in violation of state and federal meat inspection laws. Not only is this against the law, it can put your farm and livelihood at risk. Compliance officers in both NC and SC have been cracking down on these unlawful practices and individuals found in violation could be assessed a civil money penalty or prosecuted. You are also putting yourself and your customer at risk. If a customer gets sick, you could be held responsible. It is not worth this risk.

Only slaughter animals for your own personal use. Always use a state- or federally-inspected facility to slaughter and process meats you sell to the general public. If they want to have the animal slaughtered and/or processed for their personal use, they must take it to a custom slaughtering facility or a state– or federally-inspected slaughter facility which conducts custom slaughter. The animal will be slaughtered, processed to their specifications, and marked and labeled as “NOT FOR SALE”.

Can I sell a live animal off the farm and allow the customer to slaughter “their animal” on my farm?

No! If you provide a location, service or facility for the slaughter of animals by an individual, without first building an inspected slaughter facility, you are in violation of state and federal meat inspection laws. Again, you are putting yourself and your farm at risk by allowing this to happen on your property. If they want to have the animal slaughtered, they must take it to a custom slaughtering facility or an inspected slaughtering facility which conducts custom slaughtering activity where the animal will be slaughtered, processed to their specifications, and marked and labeled as “NOT FOR SALE”. Have the animal leave your property alive.

Working with a Processor for the First Time

Meat quality is affected by how the animals are raised, transported, killed, and processed. It is important to know how your processor operates to get the best meat quality from your animals as well as a finished product your customers will be happy with. Get to know your processor. Respect his knowledge and advice regarding how to get the best from your animals. Talk with him about your farm, your business, and your customers.

What should I ask a processor about bringing my animals to the processing facility?

What animals do you slaughter and process?

Most processors do either red meats (beef, pork, lamb, goat) or poultry and rabbits. Some processors may only deal with certain animals, so be sure to ask.

Do I need to make an appointment to have animals processed? If so, how much notice do you need?

Most processors want to know ahead of time that you are coming with a load of animals to be processed. Ask them how much notice they will need. Certain times of year can be busier than others (for example, many hogs are slaughtered right before the 4th of July) so make sure you have scheduled an appointment far enough in advance.

Is there a minimum number of animals I need to bring?

Some processors will only work with farmers who can bring a minimum number of animals each time they come. Some will take as little as one animal at a time, others require more.

What should I ask about how the animals are handled and slaughtered?

Where are the animals kept until they are killed?

Meat quality is affected by the stress level of the animal at the time of slaughter. Many believe it best to transport your animals to the plant and allow them time to “rest” before being slaughtered. Make sure your processor has a secure, comfortable place for your animals to be kept until they are brought in the plant for slaughter.

How are the animals killed?

The more quickly the animal is killed reduces stress and can lead to higher quality meats. The Humane Slaughter Act of 1978 requires all animals to be rendered unconscious in a swift and accurate manner prior to being bled. Most slaughter establishments use gunshot, captive bolt pistols, or electricity to render the animals unconscious. After rendering the animal insensitive to pain, the animal's throat is slit to bleed out the carcass. Done properly, the animal should only have to be stunned once to be knocked out, killing the animal quickly and not diminishing meat quality. As part of their daily procedures, meat inspectors enforce regulations regarding stunning effectiveness and other rules governing humane handling of livestock. If an establishment is not stunning properly, the meat inspector will not allow slaughtering to continue until the problem is corrected. You should note that if the animal is shot in the head, no part from the head may be saved for human consumption.

Another method of killing is with carbon dioxide gas. The animal is rendered unconscious and then bled as described above. Most small plants cannot afford the equipment to offer gas stunning, but some are opting for this method.

Are the carcasses skinned?

Some processors must skin the animal to be able to remove the hair. This will determine the outcome of some of your products. For example, if hogs are skinned, pork roasts will not have the skin (also called "the rind") left on them.

What parts of the animal do you keep? Can I get paid for parts I do not want?

Based on how the animal is slaughtered or processed, state and federal meat regulations require certain by-products to be disposed of as inedible (e.g. lungs, chitterlings, hooves etc.) Be sure to ask what the processor will dispose of so that there are no surprises at pick-up time. A processor may also pay you for parts or cuts that you don't want or don't have room to store. Be sure to ask if this arrangement is possible and how much you can be paid for this.

What should I ask about how the meat is processed, cut and packaged?

How are the meats packaged?

Generally, meats are either wrapped in freezer paper or vacuum-packaged in heavy plastic wrap. Some farmers prefer the vacuum-packing because customers can see the meats before they buy them. Also, vacuum-packing may better protect the quality of the meat while in the freezer. Most federally-inspected plants offer vacuum-packing. Many small, state-inspected plants only offer paper wrapping of meats.

How do you label the meats? What information is put on the label? Can I have my farm name on the label?

Ask what information the processor can put on the label. Be sure to ask specifically if the weight of the package will be noted on each label. Also ask if they can put your farm name and logo on the label. For more about label requirements, see Proper Meat Labeling Section on page 12.

Do you offer any value-added processing like sausage making, smoking, or curing?

To maximize the use of all the meat from the animals and to provide a wide variety of products to your customers, ask what kinds of value-added processing is available to you. Most smaller processors offer sausage making (country style and specialty link sausages), but few can provide smoking and curing. Talk with your processor about offering these services in the future.

How long do you allow beef to age (or “hang”)?

For highest quality, beef must be aged. Different processors allow different amounts of time to let beef hang. Most usually allow 2-3 weeks, but if you are interested in a longer amount of time, be sure to ask.

What is the fee to have animals slaughtered and processed? Is there an extra fee for packaging and labeling?

Be sure to ask what fees are involved in having your meats processed and packaged. The processor usually charges a flat fee for the slaughter and an additional price per pound of meat processed. There may be an additional fee for a certain type of packaging or labeling or a value-added service, so be sure to ask. Ask if there are any taxes. Most processors require payment when you come to pick up the meat.

What else should I ask?

What other farms do you slaughter and process for?

Ask for names of other farmers who use them. Speak with these farmers about working with this processor. Buy some of their product to see how it is cut and packaged. Most farmers are very willing to give you “the inside story” about the processor they use and how to get the best meats from your animals.

Can I take a tour of your facility?

There is no better way to get to know your processor than to take a tour of his facility. It will also give them a chance to get to know you and your business. It is also a good way to determine how long it will take to get to the processor. Typically for the comfort of the animals and to keep the meats fully frozen on the return trip, most farmers go to processors less than two hours away. Be sure to wear close-toed shoes.

Want to find a processor near you?

See Finding a Processor on Page 32

Proper Meat Labeling

Do all my meats need to be labeled?

Yes. All of your meats must be properly packaged and labeled. See below for what is required on the label.

What information do the labels need?

All meats must be labeled with the following information:

- The contents of the package (name of the product) (e.g. “lamb chops”, “ground beef”, or “pork sausage”)
- If the contents have other ingredients (like spices in sausage), those ingredients must be listed (e.g. ground pork, salt, red pepper, sage, and black pepper)
- Safe handling instructions, including “Keep refrigerated or frozen”.
- The mark of inspection with processing plant number
- The net weight of the package
- The name and address of the processing plant, or if the name and address are other than the producer, (such as the name and address of a farm) it must be qualified by a statement identifying the person or firm associated with the product (e.g. “Packed for ____” or “Distributed by ____.”)

ABC Packing Company
 1122 Packer Lane, Anywhere, SC 11223
 888-555-1212 / www.packerwebsitename.com

Goat Sausage
 Ingredients: ground goat, salt, red pepper, sage,
 sugar, and black pepper

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 foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.

Keep Frozen or Refrigerated

Net Wt _____ lbs.

U.S.
 INSPECTED
 AND PASSED BY
 DEPARTMENT OF
 AGRICULTURE
 EST.1122

Example of a “generic” label with only the processor’s name and contact information included. Many farmers use generic labels first and then work with their processor to get their farm name and logo added. The processor would mark the net weight of the package. Because the product has more than one ingredient, all ingredients are listed.

ABC Farms
 1122 Farm Lane, Anywhere, NC 11223
 888/555-1212 ~ www.farmwebsitename.com

Pork Chops

Pork Roasts

Pork Spare Ribs

Boneless Pork Loin

Ham steaks

Pork Bones

Pork Liver

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 foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.

Keep Frozen or Refrigerated

Net Wt _____ lbs.

Total \$ _____

Packed for: ABC Farms

U.S.
 INSPECTED
 AND PASSED BY
 DEPARTMENT OF
 AGRICULTURE
 EST.112

Example of a label with the farm name and contact information included. The processor will mark the correct box for the contents and will mark the weight of the package. The label does not necessarily need to have the price marked, but some processors can offer this as an added service.

Can I label my meats myself at my farm?

No. All required labeling must be done at the processor. You may not change the original label or add any other labels to the meat, which could be viewed as a misrepresentation of the product once it has left the processor. This includes applying the net weight of the meat package. Adding your farm name, contact information and sale price is acceptable as long as it is applied separately from and does not obscure the original label.

Does the processor supply the labels for me or do I supply them? How can I get my farm name on the labels?

Ask your processor if he is able to print labels with your farm name and logo on it. Some have labeling machines where they can load your farm name and logo into a computer so it will be printed on the label when he is processing your meats.

It is also possible to supply your processor with labels. The labels must have all the required information on them. Some farmers have made their own labels on their computer, printed them at home and given them to their processor to use. Others have used label suppliers who can ship your farm labels directly to the processor. If you do print your own labels, be sure the ink is resistant to moisture and that the label can stick to a frozen surface. Be sure that the labels have been approved either by the state meat inspection office or the USDA meat inspection office before ordering labels.

Some processors may not be willing to use labels with your farm name on them unless they have an established relationship with you. You may have to use the processor's generic labels first.

I want my labels to say that the meat is raised without antibiotics, certified organic, or grass fed. Is this allowed? What words or phrases can I use?

Yes, as long as the claims can be substantiated by and the labels are approved by the state Meat and Poultry Inspection office for state-inspected plants or the USDA office in Washington, DC for federally-inspected plants. Labeling your meat with phrases that explain how the animals were raised is called "making claims". Label approvals are actually granted only to the inspected establishment (i.e. the processor) that is doing the meat processing, not you or your farm. This is because they have been assigned a unique inspection legend number, and are responsible for all labels with that inspection legend number.

The USDA only accepts certain phrases when making claims. For example, you may not label meats as "antibiotic-free" but you may label them as "raised without antibiotics" if you can provide sufficient proof to substantiate these claims to either the state Meat and Poultry Inspection or the USDA.

Commonly Approved Claims (Can Be Used)

Raised without added hormones*
Raised without antibiotics
Not fed animal by-products
Free range
Free roaming
Grass fed
Corn fed
Grain fed
Certified Organic by (Certifying Agency)

Non-approved Claims (Cannot Be Used)

Antibiotic free
Hormone free
Residue free
Residue tested
Naturally raised
Naturally grown
Drug free
Chemical free
Organic

* Hormones are only approved for use in beef cattle and lamb production. They are not approved for use in poultry, hogs, veal calves or exotic species. Therefore, the phrase "no hormones administered" on a chicken label cannot be approved unless it is followed (directly) with the statement "Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones in poultry."

How do I get my claims approved?

As stated previously, label approvals are granted only to the inspected establishment (i.e. your processor) not to you or your farm. Your state or the federal Meat and Poultry Inspection office will have paperwork for the processor to fill out to get your claims and label approved.

You will need to work closely with your processor to get these labels approved, so let them know you are planning to do this. For federally-inspected plants, contact the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service at (202) 205-0623 or (202) 205-0279.

Your processor will need to fill out the FSIS Form 7234-1 available at:
www.fsis.usda.gov/fsisforms/7234-1.pdf

What if I don't want to deal with all this paperwork, but still want my customers to know how I raise my animals?

You are still allowed to tell your customers how you raise your animals. You just can't have these claims on the physical label of the meats unless they are approved.

My farm is certified organic, but the processor I use is not. Can I still label my meats “organic”?

No. In order to be “certified organic”, the processing plant must be certified organic as well. If you are interested in becoming certified organic, talk to your processor about considering organic certification.

How does my processor become certified organic? Can they still process non-organic meats?

Certified organic processing facilities are still allowed to process non-organic meats. There are only a few key requirements for meat processors to become certified organic.

First, they must be able to ensure that organic meats and non-organic meats do not “co-mingle”, in other words, they won’t get mixed up or come into contact with each other. They must be able to ensure that the meats in the package came from your organic animals. This is usually achieved by processing organic meats all at once at a certain time of the day or on a certain day of the week.

The equipment must be thoroughly cleaned after processing non-organic meat and before processing organic meats. Usually processors go through a thorough cleaning and hot wash at the end of the day, so this requirement is easily accomplished by processing organic meats first thing in the morning and then processing non-organic meats the rest of the day.

The processor must use proper vermin and pest control that is acceptable to organic standards. Certifying agencies can give specific pest control recommendations. The facility will need to be inspected by an organic certification agency and fees do apply to become certified.

**For resources on organic livestock production,
see Livestock Production Resources Section on page 28**

**To find a certifying agent that works in your state
see the Organic Certifiers
Resource Section on Page 31**

Value-added Processing

What is required on the label for value-added products?

Value-added products (like ham, sausage, bacon, etc) require the same labeling information as other meats. For products that have more than one ingredient (like sausage), the ingredients must be listed on the label. Work with your processor to make sure all ingredients are listed properly.

Can I take meat that has been processed in an inspected facility and further process it myself? For example, can I cure my own hams and then sell them?

No. Once the meat has left the inspected processing facility, you may not further process it. This includes curing ham or bacon, making sausage, or handling the meats in any way other than storing it and selling it in its original packaging.



Generic packing label for goat sausage with ingredients listed.

Meat Handler's Registration and Proper Meat Storage

What is a Meat Handler's Registration?

In NC and SC any person, firm or corporation that stores, transports, or otherwise handles meat products, must obtain a Meat Handler's Registration. This Registration process includes reviews by compliance officer personnel to verify that your meat products are properly marked, labeled and wholesome and are being stored and transported under conditions which will not lead to misbranding and/or adulteration.

Who do I contact to get a Meat Handler's Registration?

To obtain a Meat Handler's Registration, contact the NC Meat and Poultry Inspection Service office in Raleigh at (919) 733-4136 or the SC Meat and Poultry Inspection office at (803) 788-2260. Say that you are inquiring about a Meat Handler's Registration and would like to make an appointment with your local compliance officer. There are several compliance officers in the state, and yours will depend on what county you live in. The receptionist will give you the name of your compliance officer, but may take your information and have the compliance officer call you back to make an appointment. Because compliance officers travel throughout the state, it is often difficult to reach them in the office.

When you are able to speak to the compliance officer, there are a few things you can ask him beforehand to help with the inspection. Ask about what he will be looking for when they arrive. Do they want you to have your own meats in the freezer to inspect? How long will his visit last? Do they need directions to the farm? If your meats are stored off-farm, does he still want to meet you at the farm?

What will the compliance officer look for when she comes to my farm?

When the compliance officer arrives at your farm, she will usually sit down with you first and go over what she will be doing that day at your farm. She will want to see your freezers (with meats in them) to make sure they are working properly and that the inside temperature is acceptable. She will inspect the labels for accuracy (see Proper Meat Labeling Section on page 12 for more information). She will look to make sure the storage area is clean and there are no rodent or pest issues. She will also likely ask you how you transport your meats to/from the processor and to/from the market.

What kind of freezer do I need?

Any kind of freezer that is in good repair and kept clean can be acceptable as long as it keeps the meats frozen at an acceptable temperature. The freezer must be used for the storage of inspected meat products only – no personal use or NOT FOR SALE meat products can be stored in the freezer. You will also have to put a thermometer inside the freezer (if there is not one built in) that shows the temperature inside the freezer is acceptable. Compliance officers also look to make sure there is no rusting, exposed insulation, excessive ice build up and that vermin cannot get into the freezer. They will also inspect for general housekeeping, sanitation practices, possible cross contamination issues, rodent/pest activity and preventive measures for rodents/pests in the area where the freezer is located. Most farmers prefer chest freezers because they can be opened and closed easily without raising the temperature inside. They are also very economical and ads for used chest freezers can be found in many local papers.

Can I store my meats off-farm?

Some farmers choose to store their meats off-farm in cold storage facilities. There are a few benefits to this. Firstly, these freezers are often much larger than home chest freezers which is very convenient to farmers who store large quantities of meat year round. Secondly, these facilities are more likely to have back-up generators in case of power outage. The drawback is that farmers will often have to pay a rental fee to use these facilities; however, some farmers use the barter system, trading produce and meats for use of the space. Farmers using off-farm meat storage still need to obtain a meat handler's registration, and the compliance officer will want to visit the off-site storage to inspect the meat and freezers.

Selling Meats

Can I sell fresh meats?

Yes, you may sell fresh (not frozen) meats if the meat was not frozen when you picked it up at the processor. You must be extra careful in the transporting and storage of fresh meat products in order to prevent temperature abuse (i.e. letting the temperature get too high or fluctuating) and maintain optimum shelf life. Meat that has been frozen may not be thawed and then sold. If you plan to sell fresh meats at a farmers' market, make sure you tell the market manager, as there may be market rules against this.

Can I freeze fresh meats and then sell them?

If you receive processed meat already frozen from the plant, then it must remain frozen through the sale to the customer. If the product is not yet frozen, it can be sold fresh or frozen. Farmers selling at farmers' markets should check the market's rules governing the sale of meat and poultry, as some may only allow frozen product.

Can I sell meat directly off my farm?

Yes, many farmers sell meats directly off their farm. These meats are still required to be processed in a state– or federally-inspected facility and must be labeled properly just as if you were selling the meats any where else. It is also a good idea to recommend that customers bring their own coolers to transport the meat home safely.

Can I sell meat at the farmers market?

Yes, you may sell meats at a farmers market, if the market rules allow it. Tell the Market Manager you want to start selling meats, and ask what kind of storage is required by market rules. Most of the time, chest coolers are acceptable, however some markets require that you store meats in a small chest freezer run by electrical power. There may be fees associated with using electrical power at the market. If you want to sell fresh meats, be sure to ask if this is allowed as some markets only allow frozen meats to be sold.

As with all meat sales, the meat must be processed at a state– or federally-inspected facility and must be properly labeled by the processor. It is also a good idea to recommend that customers bring their own coolers to transport the meat home safely.



Eliza McLean of Cane Creek Farm takes out an order for a customer at the Carrboro Farmers' Market (left). Elise Margolis of Elysian Fields Farm displays her cooler full of pasture-raised pork (above).

Can I offer free cooked samples at the market?

One of the best ways to sell your farm products is to let customers have a taste! Some farmers set up small grills or electric skillets to cook up samples. Hot country sausage on a Saturday morning at the market can be a great way to gather crowds! It is very important to speak with your market manager before you offer cooked samples. There may be market rules against this, or you may need to speak or work with a local health inspector before this is allowed. Your market manager or your county health department will have more information on how to go about this safely and legally.

How do I store my frozen meats while at the market?

Most farmers store meats in large chest coolers while at the market. If kept closed properly, meats should stay frozen for several hours. Alternative refrigeration methods such as ice packs, etc. are highly recommended when using a chest cooler. Chest coolers are an acceptable means of temporary storage by state Meat and Poultry Inspection as long as the meat products do not become unwholesome due to temperature abuse, however, some markets require that farmers store meats in small chest freezers that can be plugged in. The market may charge an extra rental fee to use electrical power. Speak to your market manager about acceptable meat storage.

How can I transport my frozen meats safely to/from the processor or the market?

Most farmers transport their frozen meats in chest coolers. Again alternative refrigeration such as ice packs, etc. are highly recommended. The chest coolers must be clean along with the transport vehicle. The inspector at the slaughtering facility may inspect the transport vehicle and chest coolers. Unacceptable findings could result in the inspector not allowing the inspected product to be loaded. The chest coolers are inexpensive and can keep the meats frozen until you are able to store them in your on-farm or off-farm freezer space provided you do not encounter any unforeseen problems during transport such as a vehicle breakdown or an accident. Again, another reason for alternative refrigeration. Some farmers use small chest freezers they can power through their car battery. This alternative is more expensive than chest coolers, and may not be necessary for most trips from the processor. Some farmers use small chest type freezers that are plugged in overnight where temperatures are consistently maintained at zero degrees or below. The farmers unplug the freezer and in turn pick up their meat products from the inspected facility. The freezer is already cold and maintains better temperature control than the chest coolers.



Left: Cooler of meats ready to travel to the farmers market.

Can I sell meat at local grocery stores or co-ops?

Yes. Many farmers supply their meats to locally-owned grocery stores or co-ops. The meat must still be processed at a state– or federally-inspected facility and properly labeled for sale. The store may also have rules as to if the meat is state- or federally-inspected so check with the store manager or meat buyer. Some stores may require proof of liability insurance. See Product Liability Insurance section on page 24 for more information.

Can I sell meats to local restaurants?

Yes. Locally-owned restaurants are some of the best customers for local meats. The meat must still be processed in an inspected facility and the carcass must bear the stamp of inspection, however individual packaging and labeling of the cuts of meat may not be required. Check with the restaurant as to how they prefer to receive their meat shipments. Some restaurants may require proof of liability insurance. See Product Liability Insurance section on page 24 for more information.

Can I sell meats outside the state?

You can sell and ship meats out of the state if your meats are processed in a federally-inspected plant. You cannot ship or sell meats outside the state if your meats are processed at a state-inspected facility.

Can I ship meats? How? Where can I find packing materials to ship meats?

You can ship or mail meats out of the state if your meats are processed in a federally-inspected plant. You cannot ship or mail meats outside the state if your meats are processed at a state-inspected facility.

Frozen meats can be safely shipped by US Mail, UPS, FedEx and other private carriers by using overnight or 2nd Day shipping. Meats must be packed in a Styrofoam cooler to keep meats frozen. They must also be packed with dry ice to keep the inside of the shipment cold. You cannot ship meats using regular ice! The package must also be properly labeled as “Perishable” and “Keep Frozen”. For more details on how to properly pack perishable shipments, contact the United States Postal Service or the shipping company directly.

You can arrange pick-up services with most private shipping companies like UPS or FedEx. They may be able to provide you with shipping materials, but you will need to supply your own dry ice which can be purchased from local suppliers. They can likely be found under “dry ice” in the phone book.

More Information on How to Pack Your Perishable Shipments

United States Postal Service 1-800-275-8777

<http://pe.usps.com/text/pub52/welcome.htm>

FedEx 1-800-463-3339

http://www.fedex.com/us/services/pdf/PKG_Pointers_Perishable.pdf

UPS 1-800-742-5877

<http://www.ups.com/content/us/en/resources/prepare/materials/coolants.html>

Product Liability Insurance

Do I need product liability insurance?

Any time you sell a new product or offer a new service as part of your farm business, you should contact your insurance agent to make sure you have proper insurance coverage. Be honest with your agent and answer all of his questions regarding your farm business. This is simply good common sense to protect your business and your family's livelihood.

Some restaurants or grocery stores might require you to have product liability insurance (sometimes up to a certain amount of coverage) in order to sell to them or through their stores. Speak with the restaurant or store manager about what they require, then contact your agent to make sure you meet this requirement. The restaurant or store manager may require you to show proof of this insurance before they will take your product.

How much does product liability insurance cost?

Rates vary by company, what kind of coverage you need, and how much coverage you need. Speak with several companies to compare rates. Often you can reduce your overall insurance costs by carrying all your policies with one company. By combining your home, car, business and liability insurance under one policy, it may help reduce your overall costs.

Marketing Meats

What are some local and national directories where consumers can find information about my farm?

There are many ways to let consumers know what you have and how to buy it! There are several state- and nationwide directories both in print and online.

National Online Directories

Local Harvest

www.localharvest.com

Allows you to list your farm, what you sell, and how to reach you for free. Customers can search by zip code.

Eat Wild

www.eatwild.com

Information for consumers on natural meats and their benefits. Free listing of farm information.

Sustainable Table Eat Well Guide

www.eatwellguide.org

From the folks who brought you the Meatrix! Free farm listing for producers of sustainably-raised meats, eggs, and dairy. Customers can search by zip code.

Robyn Van En Center for CSA Resources

www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=804

National directory of farms with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. Free listing, but donations are appreciated.

The New Farm

www.thenewfarm.org/farmlocator

A publication of the Rodale Institute, The New Farm online magazine also connects customers and farmers through their Farm Locator. Listing is free.

In North Carolina

NC Choices

(919) 515-2390 & (919) 967-0014

www.ncchoices.com

Online guide linking customers to NC farmers producing pasture-raised and antibiotic-free pork. Contact for more information on listing opportunities.

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

(919) 542-2402

www.carolinafarmstewards.org

Free farm listing for CFSA members.

NC Farm Fresh

(919) 733-7887

www.ncfarmfresh.com

Free farm listing from the NC Department of Agriculture.

Buy Appalachian Guide

by Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)

(828) 236-1282

www.buyappalachian.org

Free listing of Appalachian region farms

In South Carolina

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

(803) 779-1124

www.carolinafarmstewards.org

Free farm listing for CFSA members.

South Carolina Specialty Food Producers Association

(803) 734-2200

www.scsfa.org

Listing of all registered members in membership directory. Members are also listed on SC Department of Agriculture website.

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Livestock Production Resources

NCAT's Organic Livestock Workbook– A Guide to Sustainable and Allowed Practices. National Center for Appropriate Technology. 2004.

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/livestockworkbook.pdf>

Workbook and guide for farmers who produce organic livestock. Includes information on certified organic production practices as well as a “check-off” sheet for determining if practices are allowable under federal organic rules.

Appropriate Technology for Rural Areas (ATTRA)'s Livestock Resource Center.

www.attra.org/livestock.html or by calling 1-800-346-9140.

Resources on the sustainable production of beef, dairy, hogs, sheep, goats, and poultry. Special publications on pasture management, watering systems, and fencing.

NC Cooperative Extension Service

To contact your local county office, visit www.ces.ncsu.edu

To find livestock production publications online, visit

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=animalagriculture>

SC Cooperative Extension Service

To find your local county office, visit www.clemson.edu/extension

To find livestock production publications online, visit

<http://dprod4.clemson.edu/olos/asp/searchresults.asp?s=Animal>

Poultry Resources

Selling Meat and Eggs: What farmers Need to Know Growing Small Farms Website, Debbie Roos, Chatham County Extension

www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/meatandeggs.html

Information regarding sales of meat, poultry, and eggs in NC. Covers meat handler's registration and basic labeling regulations. Contact information for NC meat regulators and inspectors.

Inspection Requirements for Meat and Poultry Businesses. NC Department of Agriculture.

www.ncagr.com/vet/meat_poultry/pdf/InspRequireM&PBusinesses.pdf
or call (919) 733-4136

Guidance for Determining Whether a Poultry Slaughter or Processing Operation is Exempt from Inspection Requirements of the Poultry Products Inspection Act. United States Department of Agriculture. Food Safety and Inspection Service. Inspection & Enforcement Initiatives Staff. April 2006.

www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISNotices/Poultry_Slaughter_Exemption_0406.pdf
User-friendly guide to understanding the federal poultry slaughter exemption act.

Legal Issues for Small-scale Poultry Processors Federal and State Inspection Requirements For On-Farm Poultry Production and Processing. Compiled by Janie Hipp. December 2001.

Information for all states on poultry slaughter and processing regulations.
<http://www.apppa.org/legalstates.pdf>

Animal Welfare/Environmental Certification Agencies

Animal Welfare Institute

PO Box 3650
Washington, DC 20027
(703) 836-4300
www.awionline.org

Free Farmed Certification Program

American Humane Association (AHA)
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, Colorado 80112
(303) 792-9900 X613
www.americanhumane.org/freefarmed

Humane Farm Animal Care

PO Box 727
Herndon, VA 20172
Phone: 703-435-3883
www.certifiedhumane.org

River Friendly Farm Program

Contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District for more information

Organic Certifying Agencies that Service NC and SC

North Carolina Crop Improvement Association

3709 Hillsborough St.
Raleigh, NC 27607-5464
(919) 513-3444
www.nccia.ncsu.edu

Department of Plant Industry

Clemson University

511 Westinghouse Rd.
Pendleton, SC 29670
(864) 646-2140

Quality Certification Services

P.O. Box 12311
Gainesville, FL 32604
(352) 377-0133
www.QCSinfo.org

For Organic Certification Agencies throughout the United States, call the National Organic Program at (202) 720-3252 or visit

www.ams.usda.gov/nop/CertifyingAgents/Accredited.html

Label Suppliers

Growers Discount Labels

PO Box 70
Tunnel, NY 13848
1-800-693-1572
growersdiscountlabels@tds.net

Find a Processor Near You

North Carolina

Independent Farmers' Directory of Slaughter Facilities in North Carolina NC Cooperative Extension. 2004.

Edited by Mike Lanier, Orange County Extension

A directory of slaughter facilities in NC that will work with independent producers.

Organized by county, the directory lists contact information, species of animals slaughtered, packaging type and other services such as value-added. Also includes basic information on retailing meats like labeling and the meat handler's registration.

Available by calling (919) 245-2050 or online at:

[www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/Slaughter Directory Introduction.pdf](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/Slaughter%20Directory%20Introduction.pdf)

Processing Plant Directory. NC Department of Agriculture. 2006.

<http://www.ncagr.com/vet/meat%5Fpoultry/directory.htm>

Online directory of custom, state, and federal processing plants. Searchable by name and plant number. Information includes contact information and species processed, but no information of whether these plants are open for independent farmers.

South Carolina

Processing Plant Directory. SC Meat and Poultry Inspection, Clemson University Livestock and Poultry Health. 2006.

<http://www.clemson.edu/lph/meatinspection.htm#directory>

Online directory of custom, state, and federal processing plants. Information includes contact information and services (slaughter and processing) but no information of whether these plants are open for independent farmers.

Marketing Resources

Selling to Institutions: An Iowa Farmer's Guide. By Robert Luedeman and Neil D. Hamilton, Drake University Agricultural Law Center. January 2003.

<http://www.iowafoodpolicy.org/selling.pdf>

Farmers' guide about selling farm products (including meats) to institutions. Written in FAQ format. Special attention is paid to legal and financial considerations.

Selling to Restaurants. By Janet Bachmann, Agriculture Specialist. National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). August 2004. ATTRA Publication #IP255.

<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/sellingtorestaurants.html>

Farmers guide to selling farm products (including meats) to local restaurants. Profiles several farms and restaurants. Written in news article style.

Other Guides to Understanding Meat Regulations

North Carolina

Producer Managed Marketing of Livestock and Livestock Products NC A&T State University Cooperative Extension Program Southern Region SARE PDP Project, 2005

Handbook to the training series offered at NCA&TSU to extension agents in the SARE Southern region. Meant to be a guide for agents who work with farmers who direct-market meat and other livestock products. Organized in a way to walk agents through the process farmers will go through and educates them on how to find out information pertinent their home state. Guide covers red meats, poultry, dairy, and eggs. Processing regulations sections outlines process by which farmers can sell meats.

Selling Meat and Eggs: What farmers Need to Know Growing Small Farms Website, Debbie Roos, Chatham County Extension

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/meatandeggs.html>

Information regarding sales of meat, poultry, and eggs in NC. Covers meat handler's registration and basic labeling regulations. Contact information for NC meat regulators and inspectors.

NC Department of Agriculture, Department of Meat and Poultry Inspection Meat Processing and Inspection Laws. 2006.

<http://www.ncagr.com/vet/meat%5Fpoultry/pdf/NC%20Compulsory%20Meat%20Inspection%20Law.pdf>

Laws of the State of North Carolina concerning the slaughter, processing, packaging, and sale of meats and meat products.

South Carolina

SC Meat Processing and Inspection Regulations. SC Meat and Poultry Inspection, Clemson University Livestock and Poultry Health. 2006.

<http://www.clemson.edu/lph/meatinspection.htm#regs>

Laws of the State of South Carolina concerning the slaughter, processing, packaging, and sale of meats and meat products.

Outside North and South Carolina

Farmer's Guide to Processing and Selling Meat or Poultry. Penn State College of Agriculture Sciences and Cooperative Extension. 2000.

http://lehigh.extension.psu.edu/Agriculture/Farmers_Guide.pdf

Guide for Pennsylvania farmers who retail their own meats. Includes information for red meats and poultry with attention to processing, labeling, shipping, and retailing. Pennsylvania doesn't not have state inspection, so federal guidelines are followed.

Consumer Information on Buying Meat Direct From Farmers. Jenifer Buckley, Northeast Minnesota Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association.

http://www.misa.umn.edu/Consumer_Guide.html

Intended for consumers, this guide outlines regulations regarding the sale of meat and live animals in MN. Great outline of what to ask a farmer before buying meats or live animals for slaughter.

Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program.

<http://www.sare.org/publications/marketing/market07.htm>

General guide to marketing of farm products. Specific sections regarding meats and regulation, legal, and risk management concerns that farmers should consider before retailing. Written in news article format.

Specialty Livestock Processing in Illinois. 2000. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics.

Authors surveyed processing facilities on types of slaughter, processing services, and involvement in specialty markets. Includes resources and contact information.

A Basic Guide To Selling Meat In Vermont

By Curtis J. Stasheski, Vermont Dept. of Agriculture, Food & Markets

<http://www.vermontbeefproducers.org/sellguide.htm>

Short leaflet on the slaughter and processing of meats with suggestions on what to do if farmers want to sell the meats.

Direct Meat Marketing: An Alternative for Farmers. By Lisa Solomon, K-State Research & Extension News. 2002.

http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/news/sty/2002/meat_marketing120502.htm

Cooperative extension leaflet outlining basic rules and considerations farmers will face in retailing their own meats in Kansas.

Direct Marketing Meat – Is It An Option for You? By Anastasia Becker, Community Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture, University of Missouri Outreach and Extension

<http://aes.missouri.edu/swcenter/sustain/Marketing%20Meats%20-%20is%20it%20for%20you.pdf>

Extension bulletin on marketing meats, including benefits, challenges and considerations before beginning your meat business. Tips on “getting the word out” and building customer loyalty.

Direct Market Meats: A Resource for Direct Market Meat Producers in Wisconsin. Edited by: Greg Lawless, Extension Outreach Specialist, UW Center for Cooperatives

http://s142412519.onlinehome.us/uw/pdfs/A3809_WEB.PDF

Comprehensive manual on marketing of meats including processing regulations, tips for marketing, and working with a processor. Also includes processing plant directory.

Direct Marketing of Meat and Meat Products. University of California Cooperative Extension

<http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/1271/18808.pdf>

PowerPoint presentation on the marketing of meats in California. Particularly good slide on how animals are sold and processed and what is legal under California and federal law.

Farm Direct Marketing- Meat and Poultry. Oregon Department of Agriculture. 2006.

http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/pub_fd_commodities.shtml#Meat_and_poultry

Extension directory outlining regulations concerning meat and poultry sales. Basics of custom slaughter and processing of wild game included.

Feasibility Studies of Building or Providing Meat Processing Centers

Cost Analysis: A Meat processing Facility in Western Massachusetts. Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation, Inc., Ashland 2002.

http://www.mass.gov/agr/programs/agroenviro/grantreport_openfields_meatproc_final.pdf

Feasibility Study for establishing a shared-use value adding agricultural processing/commercial kitchen facility. Smithson Mills, NCDA Agribusiness Development Representative. 2002.

Study that led to the Blue Ridge Food Ventures facility. Small section of the study looked into meat processing, but due to lack of interest by users and cost of building, was not included in the first phase.

