CRASH COURSE: Meat processing 101
What is Local Meat Processing? *(1 of 4)*

What is meat processing?

"Processing" includes all the steps involved in turning a live animal into meat for sale:

- **Slaughter:** stunning, bleeding, skinning, eviscerating, and cleaning; end products are carcass halves or quarters, which go into a cooler for immediate chilling. Edible and inedible offal are separated and enter various streams (rendering, compost, tanneries, trash, etc.);
- **Cut and wrap:** cutting chilled half/quarter carcasses to desired end size (primal, subprimal, or retail cuts) and packaging as desired (e.g., vacuum-packed subprimals, "case-ready" retail packages);
- **Value-added processing:** grinding, casing, smoking, cooking, drying, and otherwise transforming meat and trimmings from the cutting step into sausage, ham, bacon, jerky, and other products (including Ready to Eat products). Includes "portion cutting": cutting subprimals into fixed-weight steaks, roasts, and other retail cuts.

The process is similar for poultry but with fewer cutting options and different value-added options. Also, stunning is not legally required for poultry, but most processors stun birds.

What is "local meat processing"?

Local meat processing happens when processors turn locally-raised livestock into meat and poultry that is sold in local markets. How this actually happens can vary by size, scale and location, product format, market channels, regulatory requirements, and the structure of the value chain.

NICHE MEAT PROCESSOR
ASSISTANCE NETWORK

Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network

A national network and information hub for small-scale meat and poultry processors and the farmers and ranchers who depend on them to get their product to market. www.nichemeatprocessing.org

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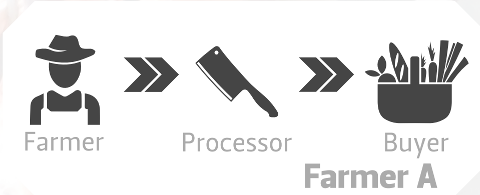
The following examples illustrate three basic types of local meat processing:

Farmer A: Direct to Consumer (“Locker” or “Freezer” Meat)

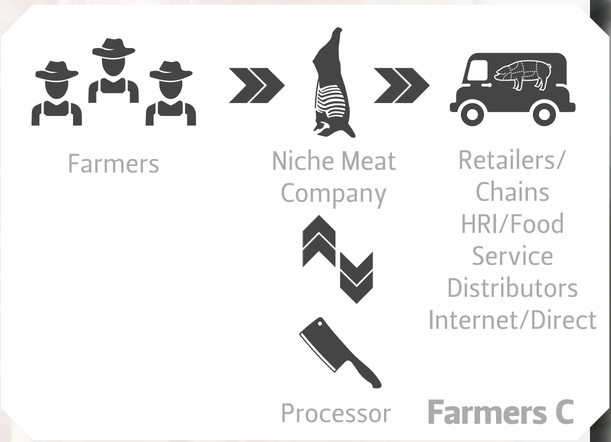


In this scenario, Farmer A sells a live animal directly to one or more household buyers, who buy a whole, half, or quarter share. The household buyers place the cutting orders, pay the processor directly, and pick up their meat as boxes of frozen cuts.

Farmer B: Some Direct, Some Wholesale

Farmer B is likely a little bigger than Farmer A. She can’t sell all of her products direct to consumer, so she sells some to household buyers and some to wholesale markets. Farmer B arranges and pays for processing, handles her own distribution and marketing, and sells meat by the cut.

Farmers C: All Wholesale



Farmers C are part of a brand. Combined, they sell a good amount of meat, far more than they could sell at a farmers market by the cut. In this example, the farmers sell finished animals to a central entity that arranges for processing and distribution and handles the marketing.

Of course, these three types often overlap: a farmer might sell freezer meat shares, cuts at the farmers’ market, a few whole carcasses to restaurants, and live animals into conventional livestock markets. A farmer’s optimal strategy will depend on many factors, including production system, marketing skills, risk tolerance, and financial goals. The different ways of selling also have different rules (see Crash Course #2). The farmer’s marketing strategy affects the processor, too: processors need a reliable flow of livestock into the plant. If the farmer’s sales rise or fall dramatically, that affects the processor’s bottom line and long-term viability.

Now you know the basics. Ready to go deeper? *Visit [www.nichemeatprocessing.org.](http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org)*