

CRASH COURSE: Meat processing 101

What Are The Rules? (2 of 4)

Meat and poultry processors can operate under four basic types of inspection:

- 1. Federal Inspection (USDA):** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) provides this type of inspection. Federally-inspected products can be shipped over state lines and internationally to many countries. Federal inspection requires a **HACCP** plan, **SSOPs**, a recall plan, daily inspection of processing facilities, and (for red meat) inspection of each animal before and after slaughter.
- 2. State Inspection:** State inspection programs must be "at least equal to" federal inspection in terms of regulatory rigor. About half the states have their own meat and/or poultry inspection programs ([check the list here](#)). The federal Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program allows state-inspected meats from qualifying plants to be shipped across state lines.
- 3. Custom-Exempt:** A custom-exempt plant can only slaughter and process livestock for the exclusive use of the livestock owner(s). This product cannot be sold. Facilities are subject to periodic, risk-based inspection by USDA FSIS and/or state authorities.

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**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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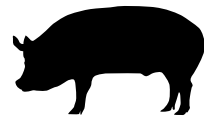
4. **Retail-Exempt:** The retail exemption allows a meat processing business to sell meat at its own retail storefront without daily inspection from USDA FSIS or the state inspection agency. However, the processor is still subject to periodic, risk-based inspection by USDA FSIS and/or state and local authorities. Retail-exempt businesses cannot slaughter livestock. Therefore the meat used to produce retail products (fresh cuts or processed meats) must come from plants inspected by USDA FSIS or the state inspection agency in the processor's own state. A retail-exempt processor can also sell a limited amount of product on a wholesale basis to hotel, restaurant, or institutional customers, as long as the product has not been cooked, cured, smoked, rendered, or refined.

A red meat plant can simultaneously do work that is custom-exempt, retail-exempt, and state- or federally-inspected; a poultry plant cannot. Depending on the state, a plant may or may not be both state and federally inspected. There are several [federal poultry processing exemptions](#) for processors who slaughter and process fewer than 20,000 birds per year.

What's the Right Fit: Custom-Exempt or USDA-Inspected?

When to use custom-exempt or USDA- (or state-) inspected processing can be confusing, but it boils down to this question:

ARE YOU SELLING



OR



If you are selling a live animal or a share (a half or a quarter), your customer (who is the new owner of that animal) can use a custom-exempt facility for slaughter and processing. The customer, as owner of the livestock and the meat, must call in the cutting instructions and pay the processor for services.

If you are selling meat by the cut – a package of ground beef or pork chops, for example – you must use USDA-inspected processing services or state-inspected if your state has such a program.

Now you know the basics. Ready to go deeper? Go to www.nichemeatprocessing.org. Check out the Regulations & Food Safety section to learn more about the regulations that impact small-scale meat processing.