

Oregon's Meat Processing Situation: Local Meat: It's NOT for Dinner



Oregon Rural Action's campaign to ensure that small meat producers can process their meat within Oregon, consumers can purchase that meat by the cut they desire, and children are fed high-quality, locally grown products in our schools.

Local Meat: It's NOT for dinner. More and more Oregon eaters are expressing their desire to eat locally grown and processed meat. Consumers want a relationship with the producer and to be confident that the animal was treated humanely and that management practices enhance the ecological integrity of the land and water. Many consumers have turned to meat CSA's (community supported agriculture) or buying clubs to get locally produced and processed meat. Still, many schools, hospitals, and restaurants are cut out of the loop because regulations have made it so difficult to process locally.

The Current Situation: Under U.S. Law meat can only be sold for retail if it has been killed and processed under United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection, or within the boundaries of a state where the meat was processed by a state inspected plant. Throughout the country, where there were once many small slaughter and processing facilities, there are now few, large processors, consolidating market power and leaving producers with fewer options. In Oregon there are 13 USDA inspected slaughter and processing establishments, with only three located east of the Cascades -- all situated no further east than Prineville. This results in producers in Central and Eastern Oregon with typical travel over 150 miles one-way to process their animals. Many have to go out of state. This results in increased fuel costs to the producer and animal stress.

Studies conducted by Ecotrust (2005) and Oregon State University (2008) point that producers want an increase in processing options that would allow them to sell locally to restaurants, schools, and farmer's markets. Currently producers can sell their live animal to customers and the customers can then have the animals processed in a custom processing facility.

Possibilities: Ranchers and eaters have been looking at solutions to increase the availability of local grown and processed meat by the cut. Solutions require diverse partnerships that contain all parties involved in meat production. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) has established a "State Meat Working Group" to determine what can be done to relieve the pressures that producers are facing as they attempt to meet the demands of consumers. Oregon Rural Action is a part of this diverse working group. The consumer-public will be the driving force creating the political will for change. Producers desiring change are in few numbers and up against large industry corporate structures that will not benefit from this type of change.

Oregon's Meat Processing Situation: Local Beef: It's NOT for Dinner

We need your voice in letting ODA and the USDA know that this issue is important to you. Some of the possibilities include a **state run inspected service**, **USDA certified mobile slaughterhouses** and incentives to **increase USDA inspected processing plants on the east side of the state**.

What Can I Do?

Contact Oregon Department of Agriculture Director Katy Coba: 635 Capitol St, NE Salem, OR 97301, kcoba@oda.state.or.us or 503-986-4552.

Ask that serious consideration and action be taken that changes current Oregon regulations to ensure family farmers and ranchers have adequate and reasonable access to processing plants to ensure the consumer will have access to locally produced and processed meat.

Definition of Terms Used in Meat Regulation:

Certified Mobile Slaughterhouse: An operation in a tractor trailer that goes to a farm or ranch to slaughter livestock on site with a USDA inspector on hand.

Custom Processing Plant: A separate category under both federal and state law. Meat must be slaughtered for the customer's "own use" rather than commercial sale. In other words, the meat goes back to the farmer, rancher or hunter who brought in the animal for slaughter. In some states, consumers could buy animals from farmers or ranchers and have the animals slaughtered for their own use.

State Inspected Facility: Inspection programs that are run by a state department of agriculture. The state inspection program can be different than the federal government's program, but USDA must determine that it is equal to or better than the federal program. There are 27 states that run their own inspection programs. Oregon does not have a state inspection program. Like federal inspectors, state inspectors must be on site during slaughter. Product from a state-inspected plant must be stamped "state inspected" and can be sold only within the state. Note: a provision in the 2008 Farm Bill allowed product from state-inspected meat plants with fewer than 25 employees to be sold across state lines as long as the plant meets federal inspection guidelines.

USDA (Federally) Inspected Facility: Indicates that a slaughter facility is operated while FSIS inspector is on site during slaughter. This designation must be stamped on the product label or packaging, and it enables the product to be sold and transported across state borders. In a processing facility, the USDA inspector is supposed to visit the plant at least once a day, but may not be in the plant at all times when it is operating.

Other Organizations working on this topic: Friends of Family Farmers, THRIVE, Oregon Farmers Market Association, Oregon Cattleman's Association, USDA Rural Development, Oregon Dept. of Agriculture Business Development, Oregon State University, ODA Food Safety, and NW Meat Processors Association.

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