



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS

NOTE 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.

NCDA MPID defines **poultry** as any of the following domesticated birds: chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, guineas, ratites, and squabs.

[NC Processor that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers chart](#)

[Directory of Establishments Inspected by NCDA&CS, Meat and Poultry Inspection that Slaughter and/or Process Meats for Farmers](#)

For the most up to date information, please visit: <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/food-system-initiatives/nc-choices/getting-started-faqs/>

Production Assistance

- How can I improve my production and utilize best management practices on my farm?
 - Contact your local county livestock extension agent.
 - To locate your local county office, [click here](#)
 - To find livestock production publications online, [click here](#)
- I'm interested in raising meat animals but don't know where to start?
 - [Selecting Enterprises for Pasture-Based Livestock Farms](#) provides some considerations in getting started in pasture-raised meat production.
- Where can I find packaged information on the basics of pasture production per species?
 - NC Choices and a team of Extension partners developed in-depth videos, production tips and tools for the below species covering topics such as nutrition, management, infrastructure, and health. Funding from USDA:



United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture



- [Pastured Poultry Production](#)
- [Pastured Small Ruminants Production](#)
- [Pastured Beef Production](#)
- [Pastured Pork Production](#)
- What are the rules about bringing live animals in and out of the state?
 - Regulation of the movement of live animals in and out of the state is controlled by the Office of the State Veterinarian. Below are general rules & expectations:
 - The animal must have a valid health certificate and must have been inspected by a permitted vet
 - The animal must not be infected and has come into contact with animals carrying a communicable disease.
 - Need to contact your NC Veterinarian? Call 919.707.3250
- If I am taking my animals across state lines to a processor, do I need to get a certificate of veterinary inspection?
 - No, not for the purpose of immediate slaughter.

Regulatory Assistance

- [NCDA Meat Handlers Registration & Additional Information](#)
- [NCDA Laws, Regulations and Information Packets Website](#)
- [NCDA Frequently Asked Questions about Meat Processing](#)
- A summary of past changes in regulatory requirements due to the closures of poultry processing plants in NC & SC is available [here](#).
 - For information in alternative formats and languages, email Alan.Wade@ncagr.gov.
 - **NCDA&CS - Meat and Poultry Inspection Division, Alan Wade, Interim Director**
 - **Mailing Address:** 1001 Mail Service Center Raleigh, NC 27699-1001
 - **Physical Address:** 2 West Edenton Street, Raleigh, NC 27601
 - **Email Address:** alan.wade@ncagr.gov
 - **Phone:** (919) 707-3180; **FAX:** (919) 715-0246; **TA Office:** (919) 707-3195
 - **USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline:** 1-888-674-6854

Your Meat Handler's Registration

- Do I need one? How do I get one?
 - Yes, if you want to be involved in a local meat business of any sort.





- Visit the [NCDA&CS Meat and Poultry Division](#) for more information on getting an NCDA MPID or call 919.707.3180.
- What questions should I ask before I speak with an MPID representative?
 - What will they be looking for when they arrive?
 - Do they want you to have your own meats in the freezer to inspect?
 - How long will their visit last?
 - Do they need directions to the farm?
 - If your meats are stored off-farm, do they still want to meet you at the farm?
- What will the MPID representative look for when he/she comes to my farm?
 - They will likely want to see your freezers (with meat in them).
 - They will inspect the labels for accuracy
 - They will look to make sure the storage area is clean and there are no rodent or pest issues
 - They will also likely ask you how you transport your meats to/from the processor and to/from the farm
- Does it cost any money?
 - No, there is no fee for obtaining a meat handlers registration and the on-farm visit.

On Farm Animal Slaughter and Processing

- Can I slaughter my animals myself?
 - Yes, BUT ONLY as long as the meat is for your family's own personal use or the use of non-paying guests. There are specific rules and guidelines that need to be followed in order to process and sell your own poultry.
- Can I sell a live animal to a customer and slaughter "their animal" myself as a service on my farm?
 - No! If you do this, you are in violation of state and federal meat inspection laws. It can also put your farm and livelihood in jeopardy.
- Can I sell a live animal off the farm and allow the customer to slaughter "their animal" on my farm?
 - No! You are in violation of state and federal meat inspection laws if you do not use an inspected slaughter facility. Have the animal leave your property alive.
- What about On-Farm Poultry Processing?



- NC farmers are permitted to conduct on-farm processing of poultry of their own raising up to 1,000 poultry/year or greater than 1,000 but no more than 20,000 poultry/year if sold within state lines without mandatory daily inspection.
- If you are interested in operating under the On-Farm Poultry Exemption, please contact NCDA&CS Meat and Poultry Inspection Division at 919.707.3180.

Working with a Processor for the First Time

- **Become familiar with the [NC Processor that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers chart](#)**
- Which processor should I choose?
 - For a complete list of state-inspected processors that service farmers, including processors that provide value-added services but not slaughter, butcher paper wrappers, as well as vacuum seal wrapped services, [click here](#).
- How does a plant under state inspection differ from a plant under federal or TA inspection?
 - State and federally inspected processing plants follow the same guidelines to ensure that meat is wholesome and safe for consumption.
 - First, think about where you ultimately want to sell your product. In NC, a USDA inspected facility allows the products it processes to be sold across state lines. An NCDA inspected facility's products can only be sold in NC.
- How do I know if my processing facility falls under state or federal inspection?
 - Contact your processor directly to see which jurisdiction your processing facility falls under.
 - [NCDA MPID State Plants List](#)
 - [TA Plants List](#)
 - [USDA List](#)
- What are some general tips to working with my processor?
 - If this is your first visit, schedule a meeting with your processor and ask them to help complete a cut sheet with you. Plan in advance.
 - Ask if the processors have any special requirements before you drop off your animals (ie dropped off on empty stomachs, at specific times of the day, etc)
 - Visit the facility and ask if you can see the kill and cut floor (if seeing that process is valuable to you and your business).



- Ask for names of other farmers who sue them. Speak with these farmers about working with this processor. Buy some of their product to see how it is cut and packaged.
- Give your cut sheets to the processor on the day you drop off your animals or as soon as possible. The sooner the processor knows how you want the animal cut, the sooner they can schedule your order and return your product.
- If you have not worked with a particular processor before and you want the processor to generate a label with your name and logo on it, please give them as much notice as possible. Some processors may charge for the initial label setup.
- Your processor will contact you when your product is ready for pick up. Plan on picking up your product as soon as possible after being notified.
- Unless you have special arrangements with your process, be prepared to pay for your product when you pick it up.
- Bring coolers or a refrigerated vehicle when you pick up your product to help maintain the safety and integrity of your meat.
- Is there a minimum number of animals I need to bring?
 - This depends on the processor. You will need to ask.

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's 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 space 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 meat. The Human Slaughter Act of 1978 requires all animals to be rendered unconscious in a swift and accurate manner prior to being bled. Ask your processor if they use captive bolt pistols, gunshot, or electricity to render the animals unconscious.
- Are the carcasses skinned?



- Some processors must skin the animal to be able to remove the hair, others scald the skin and scrape off the hair leaving the skin on the product. Ask your processor if they use skin or scald.
- 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. Be sure to ask what the process will dispose of so that there are no surprises at pickup time. If an organ or part of the animal does not pass inspection, the processor is not legally allowed to return the product to you for sale.
- What should I expect when it comes to scheduling a processing date?
 - Most processors require an appointment for slaughter. Scheduling will depend on your processor. Communication is the key to success.

Transportation and Storage

- What about Transport and Storage?
 - NCDA Meat and Poultry outlines the transport and storage requirements which use common sense best practices for ensuring the meat and/or poultry product is sold in a safe and unadulterated manner.
 - NCDA&CS requires that poultry products be stored and transported properly to prevent "temperature abuse."
 - When selling at Farmers Markets, coolers must have a maintained temperature between 33–40°F. Add ice to ensure temperatures stay within safe conditions, ideally above the product, as cold air moves downward.
 - A standard freezer is acceptable as long as the freezer is only used for the storage of inspected meat products only. You will need to put a thermometer inside the freezer that shows the temperature inside the freezer is acceptable
 - Transport vehicles must be clean and in good working condition.
- What about transporting live animals to the processing facility?
 - Trailers should be kept in good repair.
 - Do not overcrowd animals in trailers.
 - Clean trailers prevent slips or falls.
 - No protruding hinges, nails, or sharp objects that can bruise your animal.
 - Separate incompatible animals.



- Deliver animals in the coolest part of the day to prevent stress.
- Line up trailer ramps to doc ramps straight on to prevent gaps and opportunity for escape.
- Be aware of the temperature, in extreme cold cover trailer sides if possible.
- Schedule your drop off to ensure fast and expeditious unloading.
- Do not sit idle for long periods of time in extreme hot weather.
- Always let your handlers unload your animals. Animals will be given an opportunity to unload at their own pace. We do not use cattle prods unless the animal is going to hurt themselves or an employee.
- Care is taken to account for temperature extremes to protect animals. In temperatures less than 50°F, trailers are bedded. In extreme cold (<20°F) animals are bedded with straw or deep shavings. In trailers over 80°F, animals are sprinkled with water routinely. Wind protection should be provided when air temperature drops below 50°F. Pigs are more susceptible to temperature changes and need closer monitoring.

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

- How much meat yield should I expect to get back from my processor?
 - Yields will largely depend on how you get your animal processed.
 - However, a good general rule of thumb is that hot carcass weight for red meat is 50%-64% of the live weight of the animal.
 - Ex: 1,000 lb. steer, your whole dressed hanging weight may be in the range of 500lbs – 640lbs. Depending on how you get your animal processed, you can then expect an average of 50%-65% of hot carcass weight to retail cuts keeping in mind that this can vary. In the case of a 1,000 lb. steer, that would mean your packaged take-home meat may be in the range of 250lbs – 415lbs.
 - For poultry processing, plan on getting the whole bird processed since cut-up is not typically offered in NC. Actual poultry carcass weight typically averages about 4lbs or better for a whole freedom ranger bird at 10 weeks. That implies a 6.6lb live bird, dressing at 60% of live weight for the 4lb carcass.
- How are the meats packaged?
 - Refer to the [**NC Processor that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers chart**](#)
- Do you offer any value-added processing like sausage making, smoking, or curing?



- Refer to the [**NC Processor that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers chart**](#)
 - Talk with your processor about offering these services in the future.
- How long do you allow beef to age or “hang”?
 - Beef is typically hung for an average of 7-10 days after it’s been slaughtered, cooled to an internal temperature of 40°F, and then the carcass is processed into retail cuts.
 - Dry aging = 7-14 days or longer depending on the market
 - Processors also reserve the right to charge for dry age time.
- What is the fee to have animals slaughtered and processed? Is there an extra fee for packaging and labeling?
 - Ask what fees are involved in having your meats process and packaged,
 - Most processors usually charge 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, labeling, or value-added service.
- My Farm is certified organic and/or certified AWA, but the processor I use is not. Can I still label my meats “organic”
 - No. Both the processor and the farmers need to be certified to bear the label on their product as “certified organic” and “Animal Welfare Approved.”
 - Refer to the [**NC Processor that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers chart**](#) to see what processors carry what certifications.

Value-Added Processing

- What is required on the label for value-added products?
 - The same labeling as other meats are required. The ingredients must be listed on the label.
- 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. Farmers who operate county inspected county facilities (like a butcher shop) can further process inspected meats for sale as long as it is sold out of that county inspected facility and not resold elsewhere.
- Can I take my meat that has been processed in an inspected facility and further process it at another inspected facility that specializes in value-added products?
 - Yes, you may use more than one facility to slaughter and process your product. You may not tamper or alter the packaging in between facilities or through final sale.
 - Both facilities must operate under federal and state inspection. However, products slaughtered in a state inspected facility can only be further-processed in another



state facility. Federally-inspected products can be taken to state inspected establishments for further processing.

Packaging and Labeling

- Do all my meats need to be labeled?
 - Yes. All meats must be properly packaged and labeled. You must use the official product name by USDA.
- What information do the labels need?
 - The contents of the package (name of the product, eg. lamb chops, ground beef, pork sausage, etc)
 - If the contents have other ingredients (like spices in sausage), they must be listed (eg. ground pork, salt, red pepper, sage, and black pepper)
 - Sage handling instructions 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, it must be qualified by a statement identifying the person or firm associated with the product (eg. Packed for _____ or Distributed by _____)
- **Verify that all your product is properly labeled before you leave the processing facility; otherwise you will not be able to sell it.** You may not alter labels in any way, nor add any additional labels. Price and UPC stickers may be added by the retailer or vendor.
- 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.
 - You can add your farm name, contact information and sale price as long as it is applied separately from and does not obscure the original label.
- What about a custom or color label?
 - This is a question you need to ask your processor.
- Does the processor supply the labels for me or do I supply them? How can I get my farm name on the labels?
 - As your process if they are able to print labels with your farm name and logo on it.
 - Make 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.
- What's the process for adding label claims like "Pasture Raised", "Grass Fed", "No Added Hormones", etc to my meat and/or poultry products?



- Expect a 6-10 week turnaround on the application process for these added claims. They are in addition to the required standard product information labels on all products.
- Farmers who raise, slaughter, and process poultry under an on-farm poultry exemption are not allowed to put these claims on their exempt poultry products because slaughter is occurring on their own farm rather than in state- or federally-inspected facilities.
- For details on how to submit a production or breed label claim, [click here](#).
- **What if I am an exempt-operator processing on-farm?**
 - If you are processing on-farm, refer to the label requirements on NCDA&CS [MPID NOTICE 5-18 dated 12-3-2018 1,000 Poultry Exemption Requirements or the MPID Notice 6-18 dated 12-3-18 20,000 Poultry Exemption Requirement](#).

Sales and Marketing

- Can I sell fresh meat, frozen meat, or both?
 - 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 markets sales should abide by the market rules governing the sale of meat and poultry products.
- In addition to direct sales off-farm, to restaurants, and at farmers markets, can I sell meat at local grocery stores or co-ops?
 - Yes. The meat must be processed at a state- or federally-inspected facility and properly labeled for sale.
 - For step by step details on how to sell to grocery stores, [click here](#).
- Can I ship meats? How? Where can I find packing materials to ship meats?
 - You can ship or mail meats out of 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 or frozen ice bricks to keep the inside of the shipment cold. Regular ice will *not* maintain safe product temperatures. 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.



- Does a free platform that promotes bulk meat sales exist in NC?
 - NC Choices has partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension to launch [MeatSuite.com](https://meatsuite.com), an online selling platform that is free to farmers to encourage online bulk sales of freezer trade meats. More information about the bulk buying process can be found [here](#). The MeatSuite site, training videos, and more can be found [here](#).
 - NC Choices offers resources for marketing and developing your niche meat business in a number of markets [here](#). There are also dozens of resources on niche meat processing for poultry and red meats [available here](#), including videos, how-to guides, and templates.
- How can I access general guidance on how, where, and when to sell in all markets in NC?
 - General guidance on how, where, and when to sell in all markets can be found from [NC Cooperative Extension](#), which has local offices in all 100 counties in the state. This Cooperative Extension article outlines [primary considerations for meat, dairy, and eggs for small farmers](#).

Poultry Processing Resources

- What are the regulations for on-farm processing of poultry?
 - NC farmers are permitted to conduct on-farm processing of poultry of their own raising up to 1,000 poultry/year or greater than 1,000 but no more than 20,000 poultry/year if sold within state lines without mandatory daily inspection, if they meet the respective criteria for the exemption stated in NCDA&CS **MPID NOTICE 5-18 dated 12-3-2018 1,000 Poultry Exemption Requirements** or the **MPID Notice 6-18 dated 12-3-18 20,000 Poultry Exemption Requirement**.
 - Poultry products produced under exemption can only be sold by the Poultry Exempt Operator directly to the end consumers (retail sales) and may only be sold within the State of North Carolina. Poultry exempt operators are not allowed to put special claims (i.e. pasture-raised, natural, etc.) on their exempt poultry products because slaughter is occurring on their own farm rather than in state- or federally-inspected facilities.
 - If you are interested in operating under the On-Farm Poultry Exemption, please contact NCDA&CS Meat and Poultry Inspection Division at 919.707.3180. They will



schedule a representative to visit your farm for exemption approval assuming you meet the criteria outlined in MPID Notice 5-18.

- Are there any special exemptions?
 - Due to the closure of the only small poultry processing facility in North Carolina in fall of 2017, NCDA MPID State Director has granted “special exemptions” to poultry exempt operators, allowing them to slaughter or process other persons’ poultry, provided all other provisions of MPID Notice 6-18 are followed. [Labeling Requirements for Special Exemption for On-Farm Poultry Processing](#) can be viewed here. Requests for this exemption should be made to NCDA MPID Director in written form.
 - **View a list of operators approved to process under “Special Exemption” [here](#).** Be sure to select the appropriate year on the tab to see the current list of operators and their contact information. If you are or know of a special exempt poultry operator not on the list, please email ncchoices_info@ncsu.edu with additional information.
- Where can I locate out-of-state USDA poultry processing plants?
 - <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/nearest-usda-poultry-processing-plants/>
- Where can I locate mobile processing equipment or a mobile processing unit?
 - NC Choices maintains a list of mobile processing units as well as MPU equipment for rent [here](#). Be sure to select the appropriate tab (MPUs for rent). If you have mobile processing equipment you would like to add to this list, please email ncchoices_info@ncsu.edu.
- Additional processing and best practices resources can be found:
 - [Best Management Practices for Ensuring Food Safety for On-Farm Poultry Processing](#)
 - [Small Scale Poultry Processing](#) Presentation and Video
 - An overview of mobile unit case studies (mobile slaughter units, or MSUs, and mobile poultry processing units, MPPUs) is [available from Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network here](#). Their full poultry resource page including case studies, sample budgets, sample building plans, and other information [is available here](#).

Finding a Red Meat Processor

- Where can I locate State and Federal processors?





- NC Choices developed a [NC Processors That Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package For Farmers](#) chart. This sheet is adapted from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Meat and Poultry Inspection Division's [Plants that Slaughter and/or Process Meats for Farmers Sheet](#). This sheet ONLY includes plants that offer slaughter, cut and wrap, custom labels AND vacuum seal packaging. If you are a processor who has added/amended services you'd like to add to this sheet, please contact ncchoices_info@ncsu.edu.
- Where can I locate custom-exempt processors?
 - If you are located near a custom-exempt slaughter facility and are experiencing processing delays with a state or federal processor, you might consider having your customers purchase a live animal from your farm. The customer can get that animal slaughtered at a custom-exempt facility for home use. Custom-exempt plants **do not allow sales of meat**, so the customer (not the farmer) must own the animal and arrange slaughter and pick-up with the plant operator. A list of local custom-exempt processing facilities can be found on the [NCDA Meat and Poultry Inspection webpage here](#).