

Slaughter options

for sheep and goats

Meat products are heavily regulated by federal, state, and local authorities. In the US, there are four levels of meat inspection: federal (USDA), state, custom-exempt, and personal exemption.



Federal or USDA is the highest level of inspection. The meat from livestock processed in a federally-inspected facility can be sold without restriction, so long as the meat is properly labeled. Federal inspection includes both a pre- and post-mortem inspection of the animal. There are daily inspections of the facility. HACCP and recall plans are required.

State meat inspection is usually a partnership between the individual state and USDA. State inspection must be "at least equal to" federal inspection. About half of US states have state meat inspection. The rest of the states have turned meat inspection over to the federal government. State inspected meat cannot usually be sold across state lines, although there are exceptions and legislative efforts aimed at changing this.



Custom-exempt slaughter is exempt from continuous inspection. There is no pre- or post-mortem inspection of the animal. Only the facilities are periodically inspected. The carcasses and meat from custom-exempt slaughter cannot be sold commercially. The meat must be stamped "not for resale" and returned to the owner. Custom-exempt slaughter is sufficient for the "freezer" trade as a live animal (or share of) is being sold. Selling meat by the cut requires state or federal inspection.

The personal exemption allows a farmer to process an animal of their own raising. Like custom-exempt, this meat cannot be sold commercially. Some states restrict on-farm slaughter to the person who raised the animal, or they have ownership requirements. Other states allow the buyer of a live animal to slaughter the animal on the farm where it was purchased. In the federal regulations, there is no language which permits or forbids on-farm slaughter by the customer. On-farm slaughter is considered essential to meeting the demand of some of the ethnic markets, as many ethnic buyers prefer to do their own ritual slaughter or sacrifice.

