



ON-FARM SLAUGHTER: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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The Vermont landscape is abundant with farmers supplying their communities with locally raised, slaughtered and processed meats. For generations, Vermonters relied upon friends, neighbors and a bioregional food system for their meat supply. As the food system has grown more industrialized, consolidated, and concentrated, rules have been crafted to address food safety concerns but eroded the cultural knowledge and presence of slaughter and processing in our communities. It is challenging for Vermont farmers, slaughterers, and processors to comply with these industrial-scale regulations: from accessing USDA inspected processing facilities, to needing to make significant capital investments and/or changing fundamental aspects of their operations. Rural Vermont believes that having clear and feasible community-scale regulations will help consumers, farmers, slaughterers and processors; protecting and ensuring our food security and enabling community members to practice and grow their livelihoods and share their cultural heritage.

THREE PATHWAYS TO SLAUGHTER CATTLE, SHEEP, GOATS, AND PIGS IN VERMONT:

1. On-Farm Slaughter (OFS)

Farmers can sell a living animal to multiple persons who then either slaughter the animal themselves on the farm or have an itinerant slaughterer perform the act of slaughtering. Farmers are not allowed to slaughter the animals themselves and can only assist in the slaughter to the extent of providing space, equipment and appropriate disposal of the offal. Meat from an on-farm slaughtered animal cannot be sold, traded or gifted after slaughter and is for personal use by the owners of the carcass, their family, employees and/or non paying guests. This is one of the personal use exemptions to the licensing and inspection requirements of the law. OFS does not require a “custom” or inspected slaughter facility, but annual registration and quarterly reports are required.

2. Custom Slaughter Facility

A custom facility is a building that can be located on a farm, and gets a license from - and is inspected by - the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, & Markets (VAAF) to verify that certain sanitary standards are being met. These standards include requirements such as washable walls and floors, hot/cold potable running water, sufficient light, ventilation, plumbing, drainage, and sewage disposal. If livestock is processed in a custom facility, the individual packages of meat will be stamped “Not for Sale” and must be returned to the owner(s) of the livestock for their personal use, their employees, and/or their non-paying guests.

3. USDA or State Inspected Slaughter Facility

An inspected facility is a building where livestock are killed in the presence of a USDA or State inspector. The facility must meet certain standards and follow certain procedures. If livestock are processed in an inspected facility, the meat may be sold from the farm, at farmers’ markets, to restaurants and retail establishments, and it may be sold in pieces, such as ground meat, steaks, tenderloin, etc. It must be labeled according to USDA standards to be sold in this way. Meat processed in State Inspected facilities can only be sold within Vermont while meat from USDA inspected facilities may be sold across State lines.

REQUIREMENTS AND ALLOWANCES FOR ON-FARM-SLAUGHTER

Updated with the recent VAAFM interpretations offered January 6, 2022.

- (1) Farmers must be [registered](#) with VAAFM as selling livestock for OFS. The registration is free and must be renewed at the beginning of each calendar year.
- (2) The farmer is required to [keep records](#) of each OFS conducted and **report quarterly** to VAAFM. Due dates for quarterly reporting are:
 - First calendar quarter ending March 31: report due on or before April 15
 - Second calendar quarter ending June 30: report due on or before July 15
 - Third calendar quarter ending September 30: report due on or before October 15
 - Fourth calendar quarter ending December 31: report due on or before January 15.
 - **If a farmer does not report conducted slaughter to VAAFM, enforcement actions may include a suspension of the authority to sell animals to an individual/s for OFS.**
 - You can **find online registration and record keeping forms** at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov>, or by following these steps from the homepage: select Food Safety, then Meat & Poultry Inspection, then Forms & Applications.
- (3) The **law** allows for **multiple owners** to purchase livestock while **alive** from a farmer who is raising the livestock.
- (4) The individual/s who purchased the livestock or an **itinerant slaughterer** perform the act of slaughtering. In addition, VAAFM interpretations put forth January 6, 2022 - that Rural Vermont is disputing - require that livestock owner(s) themselves **[not the farmer, but the owner of the animal who will be receiving the meat]:**
 - a) need to hire the itinerant slaughterer;
 - b) need to be present if they hire an itinerant slaughterer;
 - c) need to arrange for the transport of the carcasses home or to a custom butcher shop.
- (5) With approval from the farmer who sold the livestock, the slaughter must occur **on the farm where the animal was raised**.
- (6) The slaughter is conducted under **sanitary conditions**, meaning the site is clean and free of contaminants and designed in a way to prevent the occurrence of water pollution and the adulteration of the carcass or the meat.
- (7) The farmer **does not assist** in the slaughter of the livestock. A farmer may not perform the act of slaughtering or butcher an animal. The farmer may provide a site on the farm for slaughter, implements for slaughter, and disposal of the offal from slaughter.
- (8) The law allows for **up to 30 swine; 10 cattle; 80 sheep or goats**; or any combination of swine, cattle, sheep, or goats, up to **12,000 pounds of live weight** per year.
- (9) The **law** allows for the carcass to be **halved or quartered** by the owner(s) or itinerant slaughterer. **The meat cannot be sold after slaughter**, and is for the personal use of the owners of the carcass, their employees and/or non paying guests.
- (10) The livestock is slaughtered according to a **“humane method”**, meaning:
 - A method whereby the animal is rendered insensible to pain by mechanical, electrical, chemical, or other means that is rapid and effective before being shackled, hoisted, thrown, cast, or cut.
 - A method in accordance with ritual requirements of a religious faith whereby the animal suffers loss of consciousness by anemia of the brain caused by the simultaneous and instantaneous severance of the carotid arteries with a sharp instrument.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

VAAFM Communications and Restrictions 2022

In December, [legislative counsel issued a report](#) to the VT legislature on the legality of pre-purchased animal share marketing programs (such as CSAs - community supported agriculture - common to many VT farms and products) in favor of the Rural VT interpretation supporting these type of contracts for organizing on-farm slaughter between farmers and their customers, who technically are the livestock owners.

In January, farmers who practice On-Farm Slaughter (OFS) and who had previously registered with the State received an email from VAAFM stating that, per USDA requirement, **“in order to qualify for the personal exemption, the owner(s) of the animal [not the farmer, but the owner of the animal who will be receiving the meat] has to conduct the slaughter and/or be present if they hire an itinerant slaughterer.”** This interpretation of the law which Rural Vermont sees as new, prompted inquiries into the origin, intent, and legality of this change and other interpretations offered by VAAFM staff in testimony and a virtual forum in May 2021.

Rural VT met with state lawmakers and federal delegation staff and organized OFS community testimony [to a joint legislative hearing](#) about the impacts of what practitioners are experiencing as new, and unfeasible, restrictions. The VAAFM interpretation of VT law offered on 1/1/22 also **requires livestock owners (not the farmers) to hire itinerant slaughterers and to arrange for the transport of the carcasses to custom butcher shops themselves.** Rural VT advocated to repeal registration and reporting requirements that farmers have to meet in response, but this has not been included in legislation. In partnership with the Farm-To-Consumer Legal Defense Fund, a working group of OFS stakeholders, and other allies, we are continuing to protect and advocate for small farms and OFS practices.

Improvements to the On-Farm Personal Slaughter Regulations

Significant gains were made concerning on-farm slaughter in 2021. H.420, the miscellaneous agricultural bill, repealed the “sunset” of the law and thereby secured this important practice of food sovereignty in perpetuity - a change that the on-farm slaughter community has been seeking for many years. The bill also doubled the allowances for on-farm slaughter of livestock from 5 to 10 cattle, 15 to 30 pigs, 40 to 80 sheep and goats, or a total combined live weight of 12,000 pounds. The legislature also tasked Legal Counsel in consultation with VAAFM and Rural VT to find a legal solution to allow for pre-ordered animal shares (such as CSAs), making the OFS process far more accessible for both consumers and farmers. In addition, H.315 (2021) allocated \$500K to the Working Lands Program for slaughter, meat processing, and related training programs, and custom slaughter facilities.

In 2019, Rural VT successfully advocated to add our improvements to a large rural economic development bill to allow farmers to sell live animals raised on their farm to multiple owners, and for carcasses to be halved and quartered at the time of slaughter. It also requires that the on-farm slaughter be performed according to humane standards that already exist in Vermont law (see [Act 83](#) 2019).

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- Reach out to us with your concerns or ideas regarding OFS and if you want to be active with our work
- Join our network of supporters for OFS of livestock (stay informed)
- Join our stakeholder group and engage in policy making to improve the OFS law (become active)
- Let us know if you're interested in hosting a OFS workshop
- If you are actively engaged in OFS, please give us feedback on the regulations & our outreach
- [Sign up](#) for Rural Vermont's email list and [volunteer](#) to help promote our campaigns! [Join Rural Vermont](#) as a dues paying member!

HOW CAN WE HELP?

- Let us know if there are questions, concerns, resources, etc. that you have or need.
- Let us know if you're having challenges with VAAF and we do our best to get you connected with partners for legal support.
- Let us know if you need help finding itinerant slaughterers in your region.
- Ask us to mail or email you registration and record keeping forms
- We encourage you to keep doing what you are doing!

Contact caroline@ruralvermont.org or call the Rural Vermont office at (802)223-7222.