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Policy Guide: On-Farm Slaughter and the Personal Use Exemption to the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA)

WHAT IS ON-FARM SLAUGHTER?

All meat in the U.S. must be inspected at slaughter, with an important exemption for personal use (On-Farm Slaughter)



credit: Maggie Wilson

FEDERAL MEAT INSPECTION ACT OF 1906 - PERSONAL USE EXEMPTION

↓ A person raises an animal

- The person can slaughter and butcher the animal themselves, without inspection
- This helps commercial farmers and homesteaders; and their employees, family members, and non-paying guests

ON-FARM SLAUGHTER USDA GUIDANCE 2018

↓ Sovereign citizen uses "Freedom of Contract"



AGENT 1: FARMERS

A customer contracts a farmer to raise the living animal they buy from them



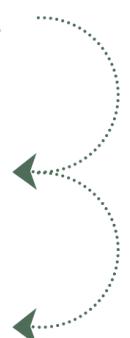
AGENT 2: ITINERANT SLAUGHTERERS

The customer contracts someone to perform the slaughter of the animal



AGENT 3: BUTCHERS

The customer contracts someone to butcher the animal



QUICK FACTS



On-farm slaughter (OFS) is conducted in a sanitary way



OFS helps address meat processing bottlenecks & the growing demand for local meat



Animals are slaughtered using humane methods



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What do we want?

Join 613 signatories from 38+ states and a coalition led by Rural Vermont, the National Family Farm Coalition, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, and Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund and support the petition for clarifying language to the Federal Meat Inspection Act's (FMIA) *Personal Use Exemption* that will affirm state laws - like Vermont's! - that allow for on-farm slaughter without state or federal meat inspection.

Since the pandemic, more and more people are seeking affordable access to locally raised meat, have started raising livestock themselves, or are buying shares of live animals, but outdated FMIA language that bases the *Personal Use Exemption* on who *raised* the animals instead of who *owns* them is vulnerable to USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) having the discretion to change their standing 2018 guidance, that currently allows the use of On-Farm Slaughter, for example with a change in administration.

On-Farm Slaughter is currently legal because of standing 2018 FSIS guidance that bases the personal use exemption on ownership. The goal of this amendment is to clarify the outdated FMIA language that bases the personal use exemption on who "raised" the animals, by replacing it with language in alignment with the standing FSIS guidance that is grounded in "ownership" and common law principles, including the ability to use agents and the ability to assume risks.

- allow livestock owners to slaughter themselves OR
- have an agent slaughter their livestock on the farm where it was raised

Currently, people who rely a part of their business on the Personal Use Exemption - including farmers selling livestock for on-farm slaughter, itinerant slaughterers, and custom processors - are vulnerable when they base their decision on FSIS upholding its standing 2018 guidance - given that guidance could be easily changed.

It is time to update outdated language in the FMIA to ensure that standing FSIS guidance is more clearly visible in the written law so that on-the-ground practitioners have planning security, instead of continuing to be vulnerable subjects to agency discretion.

"A resilient food system actually depends on small, direct-to-consumer farms outside of commodity agriculture, and those farms need a level playing field that can only be served by the protection and preservation of exempt market niches like the personal use exemption for on farm slaughter."

- Karel Starek, The Golden Hoof Farm, Colorado

"Consumers of local meat are not as ignorant as the government would like everyone to believe. In fact, as a consumer of farm raised meats of my own and others, I do everything I can to be informed of what I eat unlike those purchasing from the grocery store who most of the time could not get to know the farmer who raised their meat if they tried."

- Robin Christopher Richard, La Bonne Vie Farm, Louisiana

Stakeholders find benefits in reduced costs and emissions from animal transport, less pressure on backlogged slaughter houses, noted increased farm viability, and improved animal welfare and food security.



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Today, 19 states rely on standing 2018 FSIS guidance for their on-farm slaughter practice, while 8 states have their own on-farm slaughter laws (AZ, IL, MT, OR, RI, SC, WI, and VT) that allow new owners to have their livestock slaughtered on the farm where it was raised in ways that uphold food safety standards.

Therefore, a minimum of 27 states will benefit from an update to the outdated and unclear language in the FMIA.

Until FMIA is clarified, on-the-ground practitioners are vulnerable to agency discretion, and state-laws in support of the *Personal Use Exemption* can be effectively nullified, putting these pathways towards farm viability and food security at risk, instead of supporting them.

The federalist legal framework in the US gives the federal government the power to regulate interstate and international commerce and gives state governments the police powers to regulate and protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the people within their jurisdictions. This power includes the ability to create and enforce food safety regulations. Advocates demand upholding a state's ability to successfully implement food sovereignty laws like On-Farm Slaughter under their police powers as a matter of "health, safety, and general welfare."

How can you support?

- ★ become a CHAMPION on this issue - we need your legislative support introducing a bill to:
- ★ support clarifying language to the Federal Meat Inspection Act's personal-use-exemption to:
 - confirm state laws that are based on this federal exemption
 - allow livestock owners to have an agent slaughter their livestock on the farms where the livestock was raised
 - allow sovereign citizens to access the meat from the animals they own, without state or federal meat inspection

Additional Resources

- VT Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets support letter
- Article by Sarah Berger Richardson, [Responding to Regulatory arrears to "Ethical Meat": Are On-Farm Slaughter Exemptions the Solution?](#)
- Valley News (VT) article, December 2022, [With meat processors strained, advocates push for on-farm slaughter and sale \(vnews.com\)](#)
- Center for Agriculture and Food Systems, 2023 Policy Brief on On-Farm Slaughter
- VT Senate Committee on Agriculture 2022 letter
- Rural Vermont [On-Farm Slaughter factsheet](#)
- Mary Lake on VT Public, [Mary Lake slaughters and shears sheep for a living. They're 'everything' to her.](#)

Contact information

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