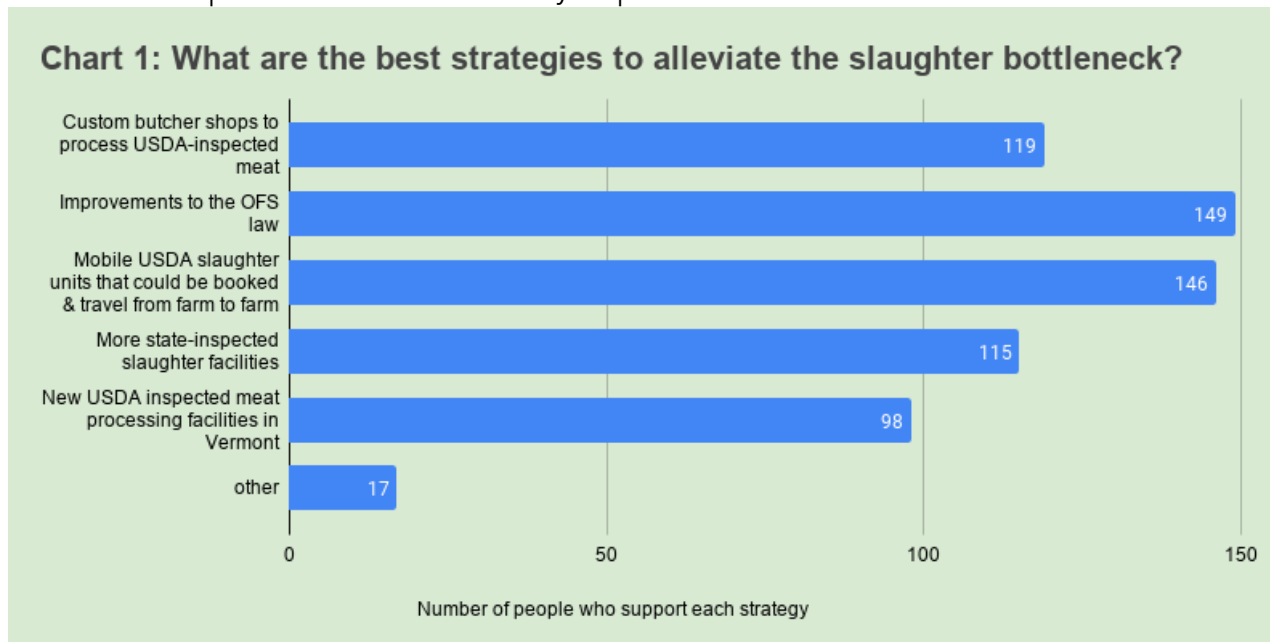




ON-FARM SLAUGHTER AND BUTCHERY SURVEY FEBRUARY 2021

Throughout the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a crushing bottleneck in VT slaughterhouses as more and more people have begun to seek out and produce local meat. With many slaughterhouses fully booked for at least the next year, Rural Vermont is seeking out strategies to alleviate pressure on meat processors and to allow farmers to continue providing fresh, local meat to their communities. In Rural Vermont's recent on-farm slaughter survey, participants were asked what they thought the best strategies were to achieve this goal. *Note: When we refer to on-farm slaughter (OFS), we mean the sale of a living animal for slaughter on the farm where the animal was raised. We are not referring to the slaughter of livestock for a farm's own personal use, custom slaughter facilities, or to the slaughter of poultry.* The chart below illustrates the opinions from the 203 survey respondents:



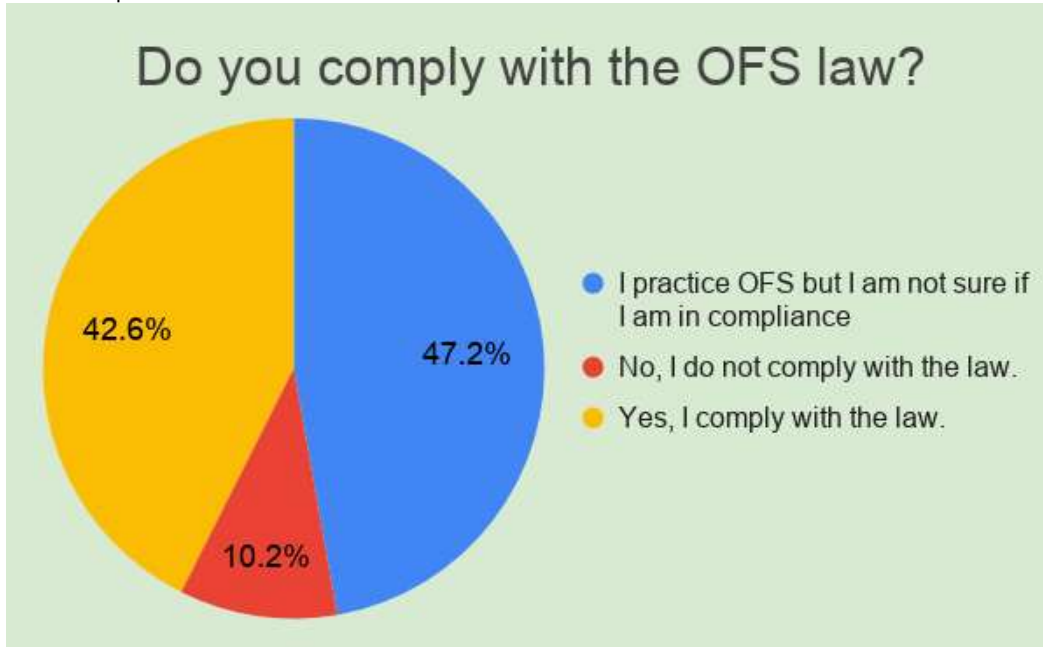
Two strategies stood out as the most compelling to our survey participants: improvements to the OFS law, and the establishment of mobile USDA-inspected slaughter units. Participants acknowledged that much of the bottleneck lies in processing capacity, not slaughter itself, and emphasized the need for "more state or federally inspected processing facilities" to address this issue. On-farm custom slaughter facilities would allow farmers to slaughter and process livestock for their customers, but investment costs and the state's stringent building regulations are a barrier for many.

Participants were asked whether they supported Rural Vermont's **advocacy to keep and improve Vermont's OFS law**. 93.1% responded that they did support this effort, while another 4.9% responded that they supported advocacy to keep the law in place without changes. Just 2% of respondents answered that they did not support OFS at all. This overwhelming support for OFS affirms its importance to farmers and consumers alike.

The current OFS law requires farmers to register annually for OFS and to report their slaughters on a quarterly basis. Many have reported that these requirements feel excessive. We asked our survey participants if they supported the annual registration and/or quarterly reports. 27.5% of respondents answered that they approved of the annual registration requirement, and just 13% approved of the quarterly reporting

requirement. 54.5% agreed that a single annual registration/report would be best. Note: see Appendix A for comments.

We gathered data about farmers' confidence in their understanding of the OFS law, as well as their compliance with it. 106 practicing farmers responded. We found that just 42.6% of them were able to say confidently that they were in compliance with the law. 47.2% of these respondents answered that they were unsure about their compliance status.



Similar results were found when participants were asked about their understanding of the law. Of the OFS practitioners who answered the survey, just over a third (36.2%) said they were either "confident" or "very confident" in their understanding of the legal requirements for OFS. In other words, nearly two-thirds (63.9%) of those who use OFS on their farms are not confident about the requirements of the law. Note: See Appendix B for comments.



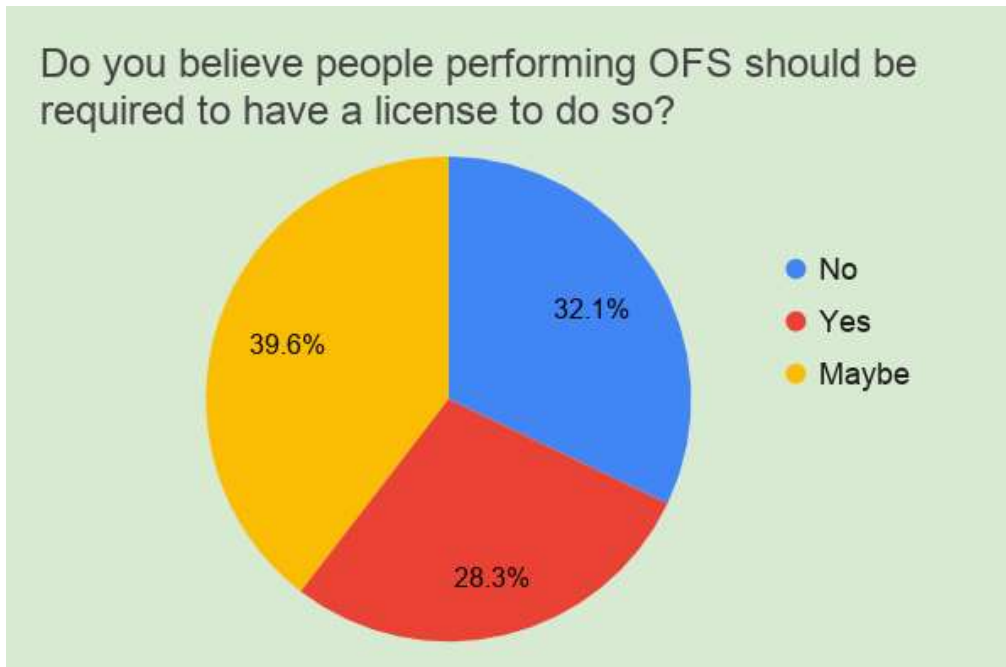
Comments from respondents prove the same point. One farmer noted being "less and less confident of the details as I read into [the OFS law]", while another said that there was a need for a website where "the common farmer" could find a **guide to the law written out in simple language**. Another OFS practitioner

commented that they were “not sure” if they were in compliance, and that they were not even aware of the registration and reporting requirements before taking the survey. Comments such as these demonstrate widespread confusion about the requirements of the OFS law. There is a need for official guidance from the AAFM so that farmers can be public about their utilization of this important tool without being worried that they might lack compliance and could be subject to enforcement actions due to a misunderstanding of the law. *Note: See Appendix C for comments.*

Vermont legislators have indicated that without an increase in registrations and reports for OFS, they will not be willing to make improvements to the law. 92.5% of survey participants indicated that they **support Rural Vermont advocating for people to fill out their paperwork as required.**

Last fall, Rural Vermont conducted a poll to determine whether Vermonters would be in favor of **increasing the annual capacity for animals slaughtered on-farm.** The current caps are set at 5 cattle, 15 swine, and 40 sheep or goats, up to a combined total of 6,000 pounds of live weight per year. In the fall poll, 97% of respondents believed that the allowances should be increased. In this survey, 79.8% believed that the allowances should be increased. One farmer provided testimony that, while they did their best to comply with the OFS laws, they were “forced to pass the annual limit”. Increasing the OFS allowances is not a new policy priority for Rural Vermont, and it will continue to be a focus going forward.

Rural Vermont asked survey participants whether they thought itinerant slaughterers should need a license to slaughter. It is possible that this measure would increase public confidence in the safety of OFS. Opinions were mixed:

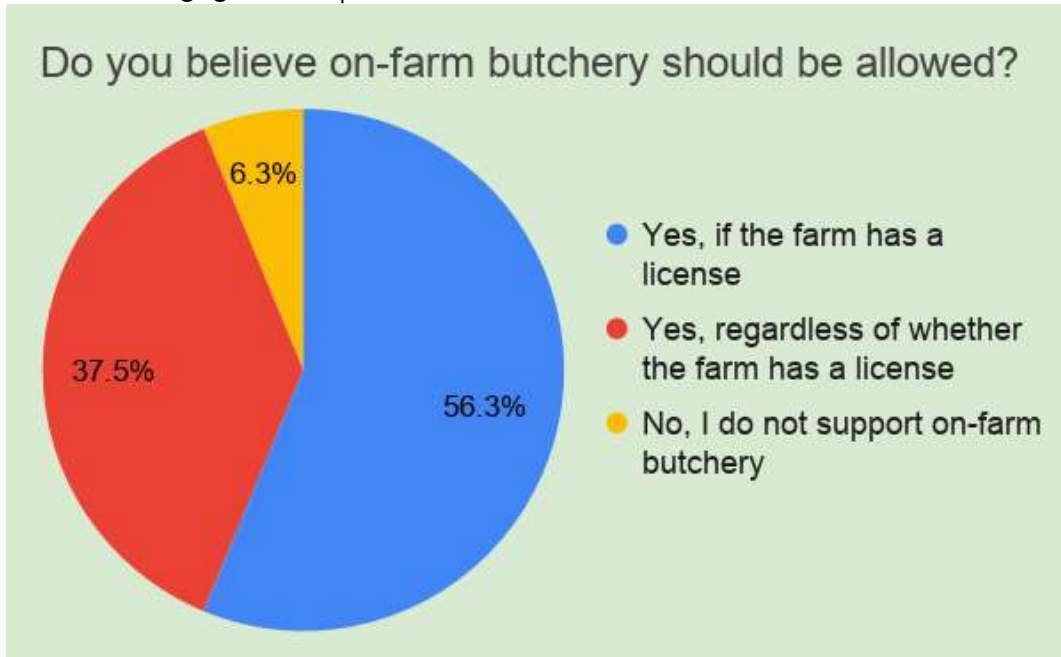


People raised compelling points both for and against requiring a license. One commenter said that “if the farmer and the customer are OK with the person doing [the] slaughter that's good enough”. Another said they didn't support a license requirement, but “a free training with [a] certificate... upon completion would be a good idea, for animal welfare and human and food safety”. On the pro-license side, someone pointed out that “it's important to make consumers and legislators feel safe. If there is ever a problem with any on-farm-slaughtered meat — eventually there will probably be at least one — it would be good for people to feel that the system generally works, and is generally very safe”. Numerous commenters emphasized that a licensure program, if one were to come into existence, would need to be financially accessible to all. It is worth noting, also, that there is a significant difference in opinion between farmers and consumers regarding this issue. 39.1% of consumers said “yes”, 56.5% said “maybe”, and only 4.3% said “no” In contrast, 30.2% of farmers said “yes”, 35.7% said “maybe”, and 34.1% said “no”. While this evidence supports the idea that a license

for slaughterers would enhance consumer confidence in OFS meat, more farmers are opposed to than in favor of the suggestion. *Note: See Appendix D for comments.*

Participants were asked **who should be allowed to perform OFS**. 67% said that farmers should be allowed to perform slaughters themselves, and 88% said that farmers should be allowed to assist itinerant slaughterers. Currently, farmers are only allowed to perform the slaughter and butchery of their own livestock for their customers in custom slaughter facilities under the so-called “custom exemption.”

Two survey questions addressed on-farm butchery, a practice which is not currently legal in Vermont. Respondents were overwhelmingly in favor of on-farm butchery being legalized in some capacity, with only 6.3% saying they did not support it. The rest favored on-farm butchery, but were divided on whether farms should need a license to engage in this practice.



These findings show **strong support for on-farm butchery legalization**. They also suggest, as with the question of whether to license slaughterers, that a license would sway people’s confidence in favor of on-farm butchery, thereby making it more feasible. Participants were also asked who they thought should be allowed to perform on-farm butchery. 74% said they thought farmers should be allowed to butcher on-farm, and 86% said farmers should be allowed to assist itinerant slaughterers.

Finally, we asked participants to tell us what the most important issues are regarding OFS. Three options stood out. 67.3% of respondents selected “allow farmers to conduct and/or assist with OFS”, 64.8% chose “allow for post-slaughter sale of OFS meat”, and 64.3% chose “legalize on-farm butchery”. These results suggest that the overarching priority for our stakeholders is to make the entire OFS process - from slaughter to the sale of the finished product - something that can happen on the farm without the need to involve multiple other parties.

Appendix A

"Do you support the annual registration and quarterly reporting requirements?"

Yes:

"unless a farmer is doing it for a profit there is no need to register at all. yet if for profit I support an annual registration"

Maybe/Unsure:

Eight respondents expressed they were unsure or wouldn't know enough about the requirement, here's one of the more detailed comments in this regard: "I don't know enough about what the registration says/does to have an opinion. I trust farmers and want the legislation to work best for them. Maybe the itinerant butchers should be responsible for registration if they're the one processing the animal?"

"Seems like it should depend on # of critters to be slaughtered--I do 1-2 beef /year...If you do 5-10, or more--more reporting seems reasonable, or?"

"Would like to understand the pros/cons of each. Ultimately I want this to be a safe accessible option."

Appendix B

"Do you comply with the OFS law?"

Yes:

"I have a local butcher slaughter on my farm. The butcher is from just over the line in NYS, though, and they bring the carcass to their butcher shop after slaughtering here on the farm."

No:

"I am in compliance except for reporting"

"[I] attempt to comply, asked the state [for] help, but will ultimately not comply"

"I try to, but am forced to pass the annual limit"

"We slaughter only for [our] own consumption and bartering with friends and family."

Unsure:

"[I] hear from many different people what [I] can and [can't] do then see others doing something else altogether"

"unsure - small scale slaughter for and with friends that have gone in on the pig/sheep"

"Mostly, we registered and reported but we also picked up one of the cows to split into quarters for our customers"

Other:

"I have had one on-farm-slaughter for personal/family consumption. It was reported by the slaughterer, with official paperwork."

"Our OFS has only been done when one of our sheep is at the end of its natural life and we want to preserve the hide."

"We've had a hiatus from ofs"

"I have been sending animals under usda inspection"

"Use Slaughter House Currently"

"I am presently not participating"

Six respondents replied that they are currently not practicing OFS but that they'd be interested in practicing OFS in the future, here some examples:

"This season will be my first season practicing."

"Do not currently practice but plans for 2021"

"I do not currently practice OFS but may have to in the future given the current bottlenecks."

"I do not yet practice OFS but it is important to me that it is available to me for use in the future."

Six respondents replied that they slaughter only "for our own use." Here's a couple more detailed comments in this regard:

"Currently we only slaughter for our own family needs and barter, so no we do not."

"I practice OFS annually for my own family consumption, wasn't aware I needed to apply"

"I currently slaughter for my family, but someday I would like to butcher for customers."

Appendix C

"How confident are you in the legal requirements of OFS?"

Somewhat Confident:

"Generally aware and compliant of basic points. Less and less confident of the details as I read into it..."

Not Confident:

"do not feel confident replying - I do not know the law"

Other:

"[W]ould like to find an [easy] site to the common farmer to [be able] to read the laws already in this survey you used words like itinerant....make it easy for all"

"Have witnessed competent, compliant OFS"

"The government has no constitutional right to control with ofs"

Appendix D

"Do you believe people performing OFS should be required to have a license to do so?"

Yes:

"As long as the funds from the licence go to support the program AND that it is not so costly that it makes folks not want to do the work."

"Yes, but I think that the training should be free."

"There should be some certification process"

"I think that it's important to make consumers and legislators feel safe. If there is ever a problem with any on-farm-slaughtered meat — eventually there will probably be at least one — it would be good for people to feel that the system generally works, and is generally very safe."

"No license for poultry, license for other livestock"

Maybe:

"Maybe but I think it would need to be cheap and accessible to get"

"In theory, yes, providers should demonstrate competence. In practice, will this make services unavailable?"

No:

"I don't, I think you need to learn to know and trust your slaughterer, and work with them!! I get it though, licenses are probably a good idea for those less directly involved with the process?"

"licensing is just another expense farmers and homesteaders don't need"

"No, though a free training with certificate receipt upon completion would be a good idea, for animal welfare and human and food safety"

"If the farmer and the customer are OK with the person doing them slaughter that's good enough"

Other:

"not a license, but perhaps a sanitation protocol, something like the USDA has on poultry processing for small producers"