



# SLAUGHTERING & PROCESSING RABBITS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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*For generations, the Vermont landscape has been abundant with farmers supplying communities with locally raised, slaughtered and processed meats. Alongside the consolidation of the food system, industrial-scale rules and regulations to address food safety concerns make it challenging for small-scale farmers, slaughterers, and processors to comply: from accessing USDA inspected processing facilities to needing to make significant capital investments and/or changing fundamental aspects of their operations. Practical, community-scale regulations around on-farm slaughter will protect and ensure our food security and allow community members to grow their livelihoods and share their cultural heritage. **This factsheet focuses on laws and regulations around rabbit slaughter.** Find factsheets specific to livestock and/or poultry online at [www.ruralvermont.org/fact-sheet-page](http://www.ruralvermont.org/fact-sheet-page)*

## **IS THERE A REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR RABBIT SLAUGHTER IN VERMONT?**

Rabbits are not defined as either livestock or poultry in Vermont statute, *Title 6 Chapter 204*, which encompass Vermont Meat and Poultry Inspection Laws, the Federal Meat Inspection Act, and the Poultry Products Inspection Act. In other words, Vermont's state meat inspection program does not regulate or oversee the slaughter, processing, or sale of rabbits - unless the rabbit meat is being sold to restaurants (more info below).

## **IS THERE REGULATORY OVERSIGHT FOR RABBIT SLAUGHTER?**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has jurisdiction over rabbits, meaning although there are not very specific rules for rabbit slaughter in place, more general FDA laws and regulations that concern the FDA, such as adulterated and misbranded foods, meats, food safety, related penalties etc are all in place - apply to rabbit meat.

Food facilities who manufacture, process, pack, or hold food for human or animal consumption in the United States need to register with the FDA (Bioterrorism Act of 2002). FDA Guidance specifically exempts some farms, but only farms that package or hold raw agricultural commodities, and practices that don't go beyond on-farm consumption. Farms that manufacture or process food for sale are not exempt. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAF) recommends farms that slaughter rabbits for marketing purposes register with the FDA. Farms can [register with the FDA here](#).

The FDA provides [Good Manufacturing Practices](#) that may be helpful when selling rabbits directly from the farm, at farmers markets, or to another retailer for resale. The FDA also has [labeling requirements](#) that would apply to any of these sales.

Is inspection required for selling rabbit meat? It depends!

- ★ Direct to consumers - Marketing and selling uninspected rabbits direct to consumers - through farmers-markets, CSA, or through another farm's CSA - that have been slaughtered on a farm is legal. Labeling, and sanitary conditions are required in FDAs [Good Manufacturing Practices](#).
- ★ Restaurants - The FDA food code requires that Rabbits sold to restaurants come from an "approved source". VAAFM has an agreement with the Vermont Department of Health to perform sanitation inspections at facilities wishing to be an approved source (more info below).
- ★ Grocery Stores - When marketing wholesale to grocery stores it's up to the discretion of the store whether they sell uninspected rabbit meat - inspection is not formally required. Producers who become "approved sources" through VAAFM (as required for restaurant sales) may find these standards and this formal approval helpful in assuring grocers of the safety of their product. *We don't know of any Vermont producers who currently sell their rabbit meat through a local grocery store. Please let us know at [Info@ruralvermont.org](mailto:Info@ruralvermont.org) if you have an arrangement that works.*

## HOW CAN RABBIT PRODUCERS BECOME "APPROVED SOURCES"?

To ensure compliance with FDA regulations when selling rabbit meat to restaurants, becoming an "approved source" is necessary. This can involve either working under "voluntary inspection" or to become listed as an "approved source" facility:

**#1 Voluntary inspection** requires producers to pay an hourly rate for one of VAAFM's inspectors to inspect each rabbit as it is slaughtered.

> **allows labeling of rabbits as "Inspected for Wholesomeness" with a mark of inspection.** Your operation would need to meet all of the [9 CFR 354 requirements](#).

**#2 Becoming an approved source facility** requires producers to allow VAAFM inspectors to periodically (usually several times a year) perform sanitation inspections at the location where rabbits are slaughtered and processed.

> **This does not allow labeling of products as inspected.** Under this option producers may be encouraged to generally follow the [9 CFR 354 facility requirements](#).

## MORE CONCERNS, QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES?

- Reach out to [info@ruralvermont.org](mailto:info@ruralvermont.org)!
- This factsheet was created in consultation with VAAFM, with information shared by [UVM Extension](#). Reach out to VAAFM about specific requirements, becoming an approved source facility or for voluntary inspection: [julie.boisvert@vermont.gov](mailto:julie.boisvert@vermont.gov)