



State Inspected Slaughter Facilities

Issue

There continues to be a growing demand for farm products sold retail by the producer. Meat cuts are no different. Retail meat sales present a unique and increasingly popular niche which livestock producers are filling. As the trend grows more popular and the waitlist at slaughterhouses licensed to process meat for retail sale grows longer, more processing capacity may be necessary. Farmers accessibility to these facilities is not always ideal with some driving over 100 miles one-way to deliver to their retail processor. Farm Bureau policy recognizes there is a shortage of slaughter capacity and supports programs to enhance opportunities for farmers selling products directly to consumers.

Background

Custom slaughterhouses that do not process meat for retail sale are regulated by USDA and licensed by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) but do not have USDA or TDA employees on site every day to conduct inspections. Meat processed at these facilities may only be consumed by owners of the live animal, their household, guests, and employee use (21 U.S.C. § 623(a)). It may not be resold and must be labeled "Not for Sale." Federal law requires meat sold by the cut be inspected by an USDA monitored slaughter facilities. Livestock owners may choose to sell shares of an animal before it is processed at non-USDA inspected facilities to divide meat with other families.

Reports written in 2018 from the UT Center for Profitable Agriculture indicate Tennessee has fourteen permitted USDA inspected facilities farmers can use for processing livestock for retail meat sales and fifty-nine facilities which perform custom-exempt meat processing (outside of USDA inspection). There has been discussion about the state creating a process to allow TDA to perform inspections based on USDA standards to provide more opportunities for retail cut processing in the state.

In Congress, legislation has been filed that would give individual states freedom to permit intrastate distribution of custom-slaughtered meat such as beef, pork, or lamb to consumers, restaurants, hotels, boarding houses, and grocery stores. The bill is known as the PRIME (Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption) Act.

Questions

1. Are there adequate retail meat processing facilities in your region?
2. If custom processors can process for retail sale, do you believe that will result in consumer confidence problems?
3. Does USDA's role in the inspection process increase the integrity of the meat industry?
4. Would a TDA inspection maintain the perceived level of integrity to the consumer?

Farm Bureau Policy

Improving Family Farm Income (Partial)

Tennessee faces a shortage of slaughter capacity. We believe the Tennessee Farm Bureau, Tennessee Department of Agriculture and UT Institute of Agriculture should work to find solutions for the shortage of USDA inspected processing facilities. This should include efficient and cost effective ways for custom processing plants to become federally compliant. Personalized and customized options once provided by small packing plants are difficult to find. Producers need to have consistent access to a well-run, federally compliant, flexible and profitable facility to link independent livestock producers to end consumers. With customized value-added products, we have an opportunity to fill the ever growing demand for locally produced products.

We support programs to enhance opportunities for farmers selling products directly to consumers.