



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

Introduction: The purpose of this FAQ sheet is to provide very practical answers to commonly asked questions for small pasture-based farmers entering into the niche meat business. The majority of information from this sheet is pulled from the 2006 NC Choices, CFSA, and Heifer Publication titled, *Frequently Asked Questions about Processing and Marketing Beef, Pork, Lamb and Goat Meats in North Carolina and South Carolina* http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/pdf/FAQ_Marketing.pdf. While much of the relevant content from that publication was copied here for easy use, some questions were omitted for brevity and additional information was added to include relevant resources developed over the years by NC Choices, partners, and allied programs. This sheet is to be shared with NC Cooperative Extension Agents as a resource for their farmer networks, therefore, information included in this updated FAQ pertains to NC specifically (and not SC). We would like to enlist feedback from agents on what additional information would be good to include moving forward.

NC Choices, 2016

Notice of Disclaimer: All efforts were made to provide accurate and precise information pertaining to the laws and regulations surrounding the sale of red meats in NC and SC. Due to the changing nature of the regulatory system, it is important to verify the accuracy of these statements with the responsible regulatory agency.

Production Assistance

- *How can I improve my production and utilize best management practices on my farm?*

Your local county livestock extension agent is your best resource when it comes to improving your production and utilizing best management practices on your land. Develop a good relationship with your agent. Invite them to your farm for a tour. Talk with them about your future plans. Work together through on-farm demonstrations or research projects.

NC Cooperative Extension Service: To contact your local county office, visit www.ces.ncsu.edu, To find livestock production publications online, visit <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=animalagriculture>

- *What are the rules about bringing live animals in and out of the state?* Farmers may want to bring in livestock or breeding stock to their farm from another state. Regulation of the movement of live animals in and out of the state is controlled by the Office of the State Veterinarian. In general, to bring livestock into or out of the state, the animal(s) must have a valid health certificate which shows that the animal has been inspected by a permitted vet and is not infected with nor has come into contact with animals carrying a communicable disease. Contact your local large animal vet or the Office of the State



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

Veterinarian for more information on how to obtain a certificate of vet inspection.

Need to Contact your NC Veterinarian? (919) 707-3250

- *If I am taking my animals across state lines to a processor, do I need to get a certificate of veterinary inspection?* No. If you are taking animals across state lines for immediate slaughter (or to visit a veterinarian), you are not required to get a certificate of veterinary inspection.

For full text, visit Frequently Asked Questions about Processing and Marketing Beef, Pork, Lamb and Goat Meats in North Carolina and South Carolina

Your Meat Handler's Registration

- *Do I need one?* The short answer is yes if you're wanting to be involved in a local meat business of any sort. Any farmer who receives, stores, transports, and/or sells (wholesale or retail) NCDA (State) or USDA (Federal) inspected meat and/or poultry products must register as a meat and poultry handler with the NCDA&CS Meat and Poultry Division (NCDA MPID <http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/meathandlers.htm>).
- *How do you get one?* You make a phone call to NCDA&CS Meat and Poultry Inspection Division (MPID) at 919-707-3180. They will take your name and number and a representative will call you to set-up an on-farm visit.
- *What questions should I ask before I speak with a MPID representative?* When you are able to speak to the MPID representative, there are a few things you can ask him or her beforehand to help with the inspection. Ask about what they will be looking for when they arrive.
 - Do they want you to have your own meats in the freezer to inspect?
 - How long will their visit last?
 - Do they need directions to the farm?
 - If your meats are stored off-farm, do they still want to meet you at the farm?
- *What will the MPID representative look for when he/she comes to my farm?* When the MPID representative arrives at your farm, they will typically go over what they will be reviewing during their visit. The representative will want to see your freezers (with meats in them) to make sure they are working properly and that the inside temperature is acceptable. They will inspect the labels for accuracy (see Proper Meat Labeling Section). They will look to make sure the storage area is clean and there are no rodent or pest issues. They will also likely ask you how you transport your meats to/from the processor and to/from the market.



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

- Does it Cost Any Money? There is no fee for obtaining a meat handlers registration and the on-farm visit. For as long as you are a registered meat handler, a MPID representative will inspect your facility at least annually and for cause if needed.

For more information about obtaining a meat handlers registration including frequently asked questions visit the Meat Handlers page on the NCDA Meat and Poultry Inspection Division website <http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/meathandlers.htm> or contact the NCDA&CS Meat and Poultry Inspection Division at (919) 707-3180. **For full text, visit Frequently Asked Questions about Processing and Marketing Beef, Pork, Lamb and Goat Meats in North Carolina and South Carolina**

On Farm Animal Slaughter and Processing

- Can I slaughter my animals myself? Yes, **BUT** only ****as long as the meat is for your family's own personal use or the use of non-paying guests****. You may not sell meat from animals you have slaughtered on your farm. You must use a state– or federally-inspected slaughter facility to sell meats. You may sell meats from rabbits or poultry that you have slaughtered, processed, packaged, and labeled yourself. There are specific rules and guidelines that need to be followed in order to process and sell your own poultry.
- Can I sell a live animal to a customer and slaughter “their animal” myself as a service on my farm? No! Some farmers have attempted to go around laws about selling meats from animals they have slaughtered themselves by “selling a customer a live animal” and then slaughtering that animal “as a service.” If you slaughter animals for other individuals on your property, without first building an inspected slaughter facility, you are in violation of state and federal meat inspection laws. Not only is this against the law, it can put your farm and livelihood at risk. If the customer wants to have the animal slaughtered and/or processed for their personal use, they must take it to a custom slaughtering facility or a state– or federally-inspected slaughter facility which conducts custom slaughter. The animal will be slaughtered, processed to their specifications, and marked and labeled as “NOT FOR SALE”.
- Can I sell a live animal off the farm and allow the customer to slaughter “their animal” on my farm? No! If you provide a location, service or facility for the slaughter of animals by an individual, without first building an inspected slaughter facility, you are in violation of state and federal meat inspection laws. Have the animal leave your property alive.
- What about On-Farm Poultry Processing? NCDA MPID defines “Poultry” as any of the following domesticated birds: chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, guineas, ratites, and squabs. NC farmers are permitted to conduct on-farm processing of poultry of their own raising up to 1,000 poultry/year or greater than 1,000 but no more than 20,000 poultry/year if sold within state lines without mandatory daily inspection, if they meet the



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

respective criteria for the exemption categories simply stated in NCDA&CS, see MPID Notice 5-14 <http://www.ncagr.gov/meatpoultry/notices/5-14%20Poultry%20Exemption%20Requirements.pdf>. If you are interested in operating under the On-Farm Poultry Exemption, please contact NCDA&CS Meat and Poultry Inspection Division at (919) 707-3180. They will schedule a representative to visit your farm for exemption approval assuming you meet the criteria outlined in MPID Notice 5-14.

For additional best management practices on on-farm poultry processing, check out NC Choices' Best Management Practices for Ensuring Food Safety for On-Farm Poultry Processing <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/best-management-practices-for-ensuring-food-safety-for-on-farm-poultry-processing/>. Be sure to check out additional FAQs on the NCDA MPID website at <http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/ganda.htm>

Working with a Processor for the First Time

- *Which processor should I choose?* This is a big question that largely depends on location, services, cost, and relationship with your processor. **Review the NC Processors that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers Chart.** The service chart lists all the NC-based state and federal processors that process for farmers and offer slaughter plus cut & wrap, and vacuum-seal packaging. These processors provide standard packaging and services most farmers want when selling their meat products at farmers markets or elsewhere. The chart is just a tool to help you navigate processor services and does not list the individual pricing options or additional processing services. You will want to call your processor and visit their website to review pricing based on your processing order.

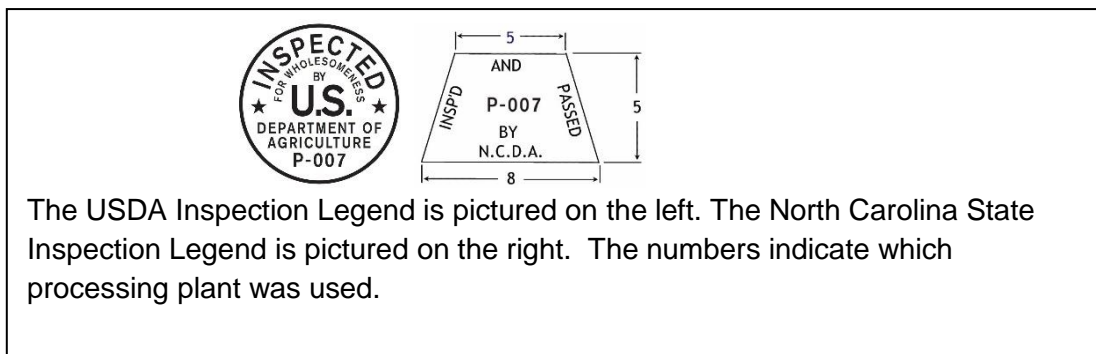
For a complete list of state-inspected processors that service farmers, including processors that provide value-added services but not slaughter, butcher paper wrapped, as well as vacuum seal wrapped services, please check out the NCDA MPID Directory of Establishments Inspected by NCDA&CS that Slaughter and/or Process Meats for Farmers (<http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/farmers.htm>)

- *How does a plant under state inspection differ from a plant under federal or TA inspection?* State and federally inspected processing plants follow the same guidelines to ensure that meat is wholesome and safe for consumption. As a farmer, you will want to think about where you ultimately want to sell your product. In NC, a USDA inspected facility allows the products it processes to be sold across state lines. If you get your meat processed in a NCDA inspected facility, you can only sell the product in NC. Consider what inspection status works with your business goals and needs. Be sure to review the **NC Processors that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers Chart** to review state and federal plants that slaughter, vacuum package, and provide added-services for farmers.



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

- How do I know if my processing facility falls under state or federal inspection? If your meat is being processed for resale, the plant will either fall under USDA (federal jurisdiction), NCDA&CS (state jurisdiction), or Talmadge-Aiken (USDA jurisdiction, but the inspectors are state employees). If you are unsure what jurisdiction your processing facility falls under, contact your processor directly. Alternately, use the NCDA MPID State Plants List (<http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/documents/pplants.pdf>), the TA Plants list (<http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/documents/tplants.pdf>), and the USDA list (<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/mpi-directory>) and press Ctrl F to search for your plant according to their inspection. The state or federal inspection seal will also be printed on your finished meat and/or poultry product.



- What are some general tips to working with my processor? Whether NCDA or USDA inspected, processors have to comply with a maze of rules and regulations for the safety of you, your animals, and the food supply. Below are a few general tips and best practices:
 - If this is your first visit, schedule a meeting with your processor and ask them to help complete a cut sheet with you. It's easier to plan for this in advance of the day you drop off your animals for the first time.
 - Ask if the processors have any special requirements before you drop off your animals. Some processors require animals be dropped off on empty stomachs, at specific times of day, etc.
 - Visit the facility and ask if you can see the kill and cut floor if seeing that process is valuable to you and your business. Most processors do their best to comply with these requests.
 - Ask for names of other farmers who use them. Speak with these farmers about working with this processor. Buy some of their product to see how it is cut and packaged. Most farmers are very willing to give you “the inside story” about the processor they use and how to get the best meats from your animals.
 - Give your cut sheets to the processor on the day you drop off your animals or as soon as possible. The sooner the processor knows how you want the animal cut, the sooner he/she can schedule your order and return your product.



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

- If you have not worked with a particular processor before and you want the processor to generate a label with your name and logo on it, please give them as much notice as possible. Some processors charge for the initial label setup.
 - Your processor will contact you when your product is ready for pick up. Plan on picking up your product as soon as possible after being notified.
Processors have limited freezer and cooling space and do not have the capacity to act as a cold storage facility.
 - Unless you have special arrangements with your processor, be prepared to pay for your product when you pick it up.
 - Bring coolers (or a refrigerated vehicle if you have one) when you pick up your product to help maintain the safety and integrity of your meat.
- *Is there a minimum number of animals I need to bring?* Some processors will only work with farmers who can bring a minimum number of animals each time they come. Some will take as little as one animal at a time, others require more.

Additional processing questions can be found in the NC Choices processor video series in the resource section of this document.

What should I ask about how the animals are handled and slaughtered?

- *Where are the animals kept until they are killed?* Meat quality is affected by the stress level of the animal at the time of slaughter. Many believe it best to transport your animals to the plant and allow them time to “rest” before being slaughtered. Make sure your processor has a secure, comfortable place for your animals to be kept until they are brought in the plant for slaughter.
- *How are the animals killed?* The more quickly the animal is killed reduces stress and can lead to higher quality meats. The Humane Slaughter Act of 1978 requires all animals to be rendered unconscious in a swift and accurate manner prior to being bled. Most slaughter establishments use captive bolt pistols, gunshot, or in some cases, electricity to render the animals unconscious. After rendering the animal insensitive to pain, the animal’s throat is slit to bleed out the carcass. As part of their daily procedures, meat inspectors enforce regulations regarding stunning effectiveness and other rules governing humane handling of livestock. If an establishment is not stunning properly, the meat inspector will not allow slaughtering to continue until the problem is corrected. You should note that if the animal stunned via gunshot, the head is not allowed to be sold back to the farmer for human consumption.

Another method of killing is with carbon dioxide gas, though no small plants in NC that service farmers offer this service since its cost prohibitive.

- *Are the carcasses skinned?* Some processors must skin the animal to be able to remove the hair, others scald the skin and scrape off the hair leaving the skin on the product. These processing methods will determine the outcome of some of your



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

products. For example, if hogs are skinned, pork roasts will not have the skin (also called “the rind”) left on them, or if your customers value whole hog bbq, you may want to prioritize a method that leaves the skin on. Please review the **NC Processors that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers Chart** to see what processors use skin or scald.

- *What parts of the animal do you keep? Can I get paid for parts I do not want?* Based on how the animal is slaughtered or processed, state and federal meat regulations require certain by-products to be disposed of as inedible (e.g. lungs, chitterlings, hooves etc.). Be sure to ask what the processor will dispose of so that there are no surprises at pickup time. Keep in mind that if an organ or part of the animal does not pass inspection, the processor is not legally allowed to return the product to you for sale. A processor may also pay you for parts or cuts that you don’t want or don’t have room to store. Be sure to ask if this arrangement is possible and how much you can be paid for this. Some farmers are particularly interested in getting the head back for products like head cheese for pork and other dishes. Please review the **NC Processors that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers Chart** to see what processors allow you to get the head back.
- *What should I expect when it comes to scheduling a processing date?* Most processors require an appointment for slaughter, so be sure to plan ahead when scheduling slaughter dates. This can be as little as two weeks during the slower winter months to 3-6 months in advance during the busy season months. Scheduling will depend on your processor, but remember to bring animals often and on-time, schedule advance drop off dates as much as possible and spend time in the plant to develop a clear understanding of your and the processors’ business needs. Also, please communicate with your processor if you need to cancel or bring in less animals than originally discussed.

Transportation and Storage

- *What about Transport and Storage?* NCDA Meat and Poultry outlines the transport and storage requirements which use common sense best practices for ensuring the meat and/or poultry product is sold in a safe and unadulterated manor. NCDA&CS requires that poultry product be stored and transported properly to prevent product adulteration due to “temperature abuse”. This means that when selling at Farmers Markets, coolers should have maintained temperatures of between 33-40° F in order to maintain a product temperature of 40 degrees or below. ADD ICE to ensure temperatures stay within safe conditions. Ideally, ice should be placed above product, as cold air moves downward. A standard freezer is acceptable as long as the freezer is only used for the storage of inspected meat products only – no personal use or NOT FOR SALE meat products can be stored in the freezer. You will also have to put a thermometer inside the freezer (if there is not one built in) that shows the temperature inside the freezer is acceptable. Transport vehicles must be clean and in good working condition.



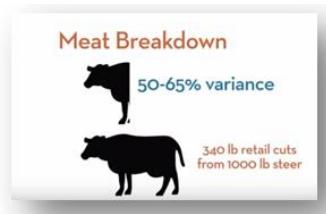
FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

- What about Transporting Live Animals to the Processing Facility? Piedmont Custom Meats has shared excellent guidelines pertaining to animal welfare when transporting meats to their facility. Below are their guidelines for reference:
 - Trailers should be kept in good repair.
 - Do not overcrowd animals in trailer.
 - Clean trailers prevent slips or falls.
 - No protruding hinges, nails, or sharp objects that can bruise your animal.
 - Separate incompatible animals.
 - Deliver animals in the coolest part of the day to prevent stress.
 - Line up trailer ramps to doc ramps straight on to prevent gaps and opportunity for escape.
 - Be aware of the temperature, in extreme cold cover trailer sides if possible.
 - Schedule your drop off to ensure fast and expeditious unloading.
 - Do not sit idle for long periods of time in extreme hot weather.
 - Always let your handlers unload your animals. Animals will be given an opportunity to unload at their own pace. We do not use cattle prods unless the animal is going to hurt themselves or an employee.
 - Care is taken to account for temperature extremes to protect animals. In temperatures less than 50 degrees F, trailers are bedded. In extreme cold (<20F) animals are bedded with straw or deep shavings. In trailers over 80 degrees F, animals are sprinkled with water routinely. Wind protection should be provided when air temperature drops below 50 degrees F. Pigs are more susceptible to temperature changes and need closer monitoring.

What should I ask about how the meat is processed, cut and packaged?

- How much meat yield should I expect to get back from my processor? When developing a good working relationship with your processor, it's important to understand yields and return on meat products after you drop your animals off. Yields will largely depend on how you get your animal processed. However, a good general rule of thumb is that hot carcass weight for red meat is 50%-64% of the live weight of the animal, so if you have a 1,000 lb. steer, your whole dressed hanging weight may be in the range of 500lbs – 640lbs. Depending on how you get your animal processed, you can then expect an average of 50%-65% of hot carcass weight to retail cuts keeping in mind that this can vary depending on other factors such as species, bone-in vs. boneless, fat content in ground products (80% lean vs 70% lean), heat treated or cured products, cooling and dry aging meat, as well as other factors. In the case of a 1,000 lb. steer, that would mean your packaged take-home meat may be in the range of 250lbs. – 415lbs.

FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹



For poultry processing, plan on getting whole bird processed since cut-up is not typically offered in our NC facilities since it tends to be cost prohibitive for the producer. Actual poultry carcass weight typically averages about 4lbs or better for a whole freedom ranger bird at 10 weeks. That implies a 6.6lb live bird, dressing at 60% of live weight for the 4lb carcass.

- How are the meats packaged? Refer to the **NC Processors that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers Chart** to see if processors offer packaging options in addition to standard vacuum seal packaging. The processor chart only includes processors who offer standard vacuum seal packaging as compared to freezer paper wrap. Since vacuum-packing may better protect the quality of the meat while in the freezer, NC Choices only includes this type of packaging in the list since it has become standardized when selling meat to customers as compared to freezer paper. That said, both freezer paper and vacuum seal paper are acceptable packages for resale. Additional packaging services, such as rollstock packaging, offer a professional retail look with a flat side and a raised side similar to hotdog packaging. This equipment is prohibitive for many small processors but refer to the processor service chart for details.
- Do you offer any value-added processing like sausage making, smoking, or curing? Most small processors offer sausage making (country style and specialty link sausages), but few can provide smoking and curing. Refer to the **NC Processors that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers Chart** to see if processors offer sausage making, smoking, and curing. Talk with your processor about offering these services in the future.
- How long do you allow beef to age (or “hang”)? Many people say dry aging adds a beefier flavor. Beef is typically hung for an average of 7-10 days after it’s been slaughtered, cooled to an internal temperature of 40 degrees, and then the carcass is processed into retail cuts. Most people consider dry aging to be for hang times longer than 7-14 days. Dry aging can extend for longer periods of time—from 14-21 days, or sometimes up to 32 days or longer, for niche markets. Keep in mind that dry aging of beef reduces overall yield and that not all processors offer the ability to dry age for extended periods of time since it depends on the processor’s storage capacity and service offered. Processors also reserve the right to charge for dry age time as it can cost them valuable cooler space that can be used for other customers.



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

- What is the fee to have animals slaughtered and processed? Is there an extra fee for packaging and labeling? Be sure to ask what fees are involved in having your meats processed and packaged. The processor usually charges a flat fee for the slaughter and an additional price per pound of meat processed. There may be an additional fee for a certain type of packaging or labeling or a value-added service, so be sure to ask. Ask if there are any taxes. Most processors require payment when you come to pick up the meat.
- My farm is certified organic and/or certified AWA, but the processor I use is not. Can I still label my meats “organic”? No. The most common claims that require *both* the processor and the farmer be certified to bear the label on their product are “certified organic” “Animal Welfare Approved”. If you are interested in becoming certified organic or AWA approved, talk to your processor about considering certification or explore processing options. Refer to the **NC Processors that Slaughter, Process, & Vacuum Package for Farmers Chart** to see what processors carry what certifications. For details on how your processor can become certified organic, visit *Frequently Asked Questions about Processing and Marketing Beef, Pork, Lamb and Goat Meats In North Carolina and South Carolina*, pg.24
http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/pdf/FAQ_Marketing.pdf

Value-Added Processing

- What is required on the label for value-added products? Value-added products (like ham, sausage, bacon, etc.) require the same labeling information as other meats. For products that have more than one ingredient (like sausage), the ingredients must be listed on the label.
- Can I take meat that has been processed in an inspected facility and further process it myself? For example, can I cure my own hams and then sell them? No. Once the meat has left the inspected processing facility, you may not further process it. This includes curing ham or bacon, making sausage, or handling the meats in any way other than storing it and selling it in its original packaging. Farmers who also operate county inspected county facilities (like a butcher shop) can further process inspected meats for sale as long as it is sold out of that county inspected facility and not resold elsewhere.
- Can I take my meat that has been processed in an inspected facility and further process it at another inspected facility that specializes in value-added products? Yes, you may use more than one facility to slaughter and process your product. You may not tamper or alter the packaging in between facilities or through final sale. Both facilities must operate under federal and state inspection. However, products slaughtered in a state inspected facility can only be further-processed in another state facility (A.K.A. state inspected product cannot be taken to federally inspected establishments for further



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

processing. Federally-inspected product can be taken to state inspected establishments for further processing).

Packaging and Labeling

- *Do all my meats need to be labeled?* Yes. All of your meats must be properly packaged and labeled. See below for what is required on the label. Keep in mind that the name of the product is not up to the farmer discretion but rather according to the official product name by USDA.
- *What information do the labels need?* All meats must be labeled with the following information:
 - The contents of the package (name of the product) (e.g. “lamb chops”, “ground beef”, or “pork sausage”)
 - If the contents have other ingredients (like spices in sausage), those ingredients must be listed (e.g. ground pork, salt, red pepper, sage, and black pepper”)
 - Safe handling instructions, including “Keep refrigerated or frozen”
 - The mark of inspection with processing plant number
 - The net weight of the package
 - The name and address of the processing plant, or if the name and address are other than the producer, (such as the name and address of a farm) it must be qualified by a statement identifying the person or firm associated with the product (e.g. “Packed for ___” or “Distributed by ___.” Alternately, farms can include name, city, state, and telephone #.

Verify that all your product is properly labeled before you leave the processing facility; otherwise you will not be able to sell it. You may not alter labels in any way, nor add any additional labels. Price and UPC stickers may be added by the retailer or vendor.

FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹



Example of a complete label

- Can I label my meats myself at my farm? No. All required labeling must be done at the processor. You may not change the original label or add any other labels to the meat, which could be viewed as a misrepresentation of the product once it has left the processor. This includes applying the net weight of the meat package. Adding your farm name, contact information and sale price is acceptable as long as it is applied separately from and does not obscure the original label.
- What about a custom or color label? You may want to start with a simple name and logo on your labels using your processor's in-house label printer before sending your labels off to an outside company for custom design. Most processing facilities just print in black and white but this is a question you can ask your processor directly.
- Does the processor supply the labels for me or do I supply them? How can I get my farm name on the labels? Ask your processor if he/she is able to print labels with your farm name and logo on it. Some have labeling machines where they can load your farm name and logo into a computer so it will be printed on the label when they process your meats. It is also possible to supply your processor with labels. The labels must have all the required information on them. Some farmers have made their own labels on their computer, printed them at home and given them to their processor to use. Others have used label suppliers who can ship your farm labels directly to the processor.

If you do print your own labels, be sure the ink is resistant to moisture and that the label can stick to a frozen surface. Be sure that the labels have been approved either by the state meat inspection office or the USDA meat inspection office before ordering labels. Ordering labels in bulk will be the most cost effective strategy (most label cases have a 10-12 case minimum), so you will want to choose a label that's versatile and you can stick with for a while. Depending on the label, it may likely be sent directly to your processor.



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

Some processors may not be willing to use labels with your farm name on them unless they have an established relationship with you. You may have to use the processor's generic labels first.

- *What's the process for adding label claims like "Pasture Raised", "Grass Fed", "No Added Hormones", etc. to my meat and/or poultry products?* A growing number of farmers are interested in adding claims to the labels of their meat and poultry products to further characterize or add value to those products. These claims commonly include animal production claims and breed claims and are in *addition to* the required standard product information labels on all products (listed above). Expect 6-10 week turnaround on the application process.

*Do allow yourself time (at least one month) to submit designed labels along with supporting documents to the management of the inspected facility where you take your animals for processing. Because label approvals are granted to processors for use, they do not belong to the farm or producer of the animal or meat product. The special claim is only approved for the processor who is listed on the application. If you process at more than one facility, a separate application is needed for each facility.

Farmers who raise, slaughter, and process poultry under an on-farm poultry exemption are not allowed to put these claims on their exempt poultry products because slaughter is occurring on their own farm rather than in a state- or federally-inspected facility. For details on how to submit a production or breed label claim, check out *Special Claims and The Approval Process for Niche Meat Production* (<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/special-claims-and-the-approval-process-for-niche-meat-production>).

Sales and Marketing

- *Can I sell fresh meat, frozen meat, or both?* If you receive processed meat already frozen from the plant, then it must remain frozen through the sale to the customer. If the product is not yet frozen, it can be sold fresh or frozen. Farmers selling at farmers' markets should check the market's rules governing the sale of meat and poultry, as some may only allow frozen product.
- *In addition to direct sales off-farm, to restaurants, and at farmers markets, can I sell meat at local grocery stores or co-ops?* Yes. Many farmers supply their meats to locally-owned grocery stores or co-ops. The meat must still be processed at a state- or federally-inspected facility and properly labeled for sale. The store may also have rules as to if the meat is state- or federally-inspected so check with the store manager or meat buyer. Some stores may require proof of liability insurance. For step by step details on how to sell to grocery stores, visit NC Choices and NCGT's, *How to Sell Pastured Meat Products to Grocery Stores via Direct Store Delivery* <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/how-to-sell-pastured-meat-products-to-grocery-stores>.
- *Can I ship meats? How? Where can I find packing materials to ship meats?* You can ship or mail meats out of the state if your meats are processed in a federally inspected



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

plant. You cannot ship or mail meats outside the state if your meats are processed at a state-inspected facility.

Frozen meats can be safely shipped by US Mail, UPS, FedEx and other private carriers by using overnight or 2nd Day shipping. Meats must be packed in a Styrofoam cooler to keep meats frozen. They must also be packed with dry ice or frozen ice bricks to keep the inside of the shipment cold. Regular ice will *not* maintain safe product temperatures. The package must also be properly labeled as “Perishable” and “Keep Frozen”. For more details on how to properly pack perishable shipments, contact the United States Postal Service or the shipping company directly.

You can arrange pick-up services with most private shipping companies like UPS or FedEx. They may be able to provide you with shipping materials, but you will need to supply your own dry ice which can be purchased from local suppliers.

Please review a thorough list of resources and contributing partners listed and additional information in the *Frequently Asked Questions about Processing and Marketing Beef, Pork, Lamb and Goat Meats in North Carolina and South Carolina*

http://www.ncagr.gov/MeatPoultry/pdf/FAQ_Marketing.pdf

Additional Partners

Center for Environmental Farming Systems <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/>

North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Meat and Poultry Inspection Division <http://www.ncagr.gov/meatpoultry/info.htm>

USDA’s Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) Small Plant Help Desk <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/regulatory-compliance/svsp/sphelpdes>

NC Cooperative Extension Service: To contact your local county office, visit www.ces.ncsu.edu, To find livestock production publications online, visit <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=animalagriculture>

NC Cooperative Extension Niche Meat Working Group: Amanda Carter, (Stakeholder) Plant Manager for Foothills Pilot Plant in Marion, NC amanda@foothillspilotplant.com, Adam Ross, (Extension Agent), Extension Agent, Agriculture – Livestock, Duplin County Center aross@ncsu.edu, Brian Parrish, (Extension Agent), NCSU Extension Agent, Agriculture - Field Crops and Livestock Harnett County Center brian_parrish@ncsu.edu, Donna Moore, (Stakeholder) Owner of Piedmont Custom Meats in Gibsonville, NC dmoore@piedmontcustommeats.com, Grace Summers gsummers@ag.ncat.edu (Extension Associate), NC A&T Extension Associate, Horticulture gsummers@ag.ncat.edu, Lauren Langley (Extension Agent), NCSU Extension Agent, Agriculture - Livestock and Forages Alamance County Center lkbrown2@ncsu.edu, Martha Mobley (Extension Agent), NCSU Extension Agent,



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

Agriculture Franklin County Center mleona1@ncsu.edu, Sheila Neal, (Campus-Based Extension/CEFS program) NC Choices Program Coordinator sheila@ncchoices.com, Sarah Blacklin, (Campus-Based Extension/CEFS program) NC Choices' Program Director sarah@ncchoices.com

Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network <http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/>

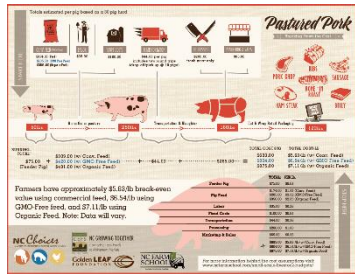
Additional Resources

Marketing Resources for Farmers to Share with Customers:



NC Choices' Pastured Poultry: Breaking Down the Cost (NC Choices' resource materials at the bottom of page)

<https://cefs.ncsu.edu/food-system-initiatives/nc-choices/>



NC Choices' Pastured Pork: Breaking Down the Cost (NC Choices' resource materials at the bottom of page)

<https://cefs.ncsu.edu/food-system-initiatives/nc-choices/>

Coming Soon: Grass fed Beef: Breaking Down the Cost

NC Choices' Planning Ahead When Buying Local Meat in Bulk, https://cefs.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Consumer_Fact_Sheet_Interested-in-buying-local-meat_-1.pdf

Business and Marketing Resources:

CEFS' NC Choices and NC Growing Together Resources: www.ncchoices.com,

<https://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/#> including

- NCGT GAP Certification Training & Food Safety Funding Guide For North Carolina Producers (includes mini-grants and financial options for producers) <https://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-10-06-NCGT-GAP-Assistance-Flyer.pdf>
- How to Sell Pastured Meat Products to Grocery Stores via Direct Store Delivery: http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/show_ep3_pdf/1467834536/23196/
- The Special Claims and The Approval Process: <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/special-claims-and-the-approval-process-for-niche-meat-production>



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

- FAQs: Agriculture Marketing Services Withdrawal of the Grass fed Claim: <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/AMS-Withdrawal-Grassfed-Claim.pdf>
- Best Management Practices for Ensuring Food Safety for On Farm Poultry Processing: https://cefs.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/NCC_Poultry_BMP_Announcement-1.pdf
- NC Statewide Niche Meat Survey <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/north-carolina-niche-meat-producers-survey-2013/>
- NC Choices' Technical Assistance Training Manual <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/nc-choices-technical-assistance-training-manual/>
- Instructional Videos:
 - NC Choices and Amazing Grazing's Pasture Management and Meat Quality Video <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/pasture-management-and-meat-quality-2015/>
 - NC Choices Poultry Breakdown video <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/poultry-breakdown/>
 - NC Choices Processor video series: Meat Packaging, What Should I Expect <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/meat-processor-what-packaging-should-i-expect/>
 - NC Choices Processor video series: Does your processor offer value added options for sausage products? <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/meat-processor-does-your-processor-offer-value-added-options-for-sausage-products/>
 - NC Choices Processor video series: Brining Pork, Value Added Product <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/meat-processor-brining-pork-value-added-product/>
 - NC Choices Processor video series: Dry Aging Vs. Wet Aging <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/meat-processor-dry-aging-vs-wet-aging/>
 - NC Choices Processor video series: How Much Yield Am I Getting Back <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/meat-processor-meat-yield-how-much-meat-am-i-getting-back/>

Production Resources:

NC Cooperative Extension Service: To contact your local county office, visit www.ces.ncsu.edu,
To find livestock production publications online, visit <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=animalagriculture>

CEFS' Amazing Grazing Pasture-Based Beef Resources including:

- NC State Local Pasture-Raised and Pasture-Finished Beef Production Guidelines, LF-011-03 <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/nc-state-local-pasture-raised-and-pasture-finished-beef-production-guidelines>
- NC State Local Grass-Fed Beef Production Guidelines <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/nc-state-local-grass-fed-beef-production-guidelines>
- Forage Facts Grazing Guide <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/forage-facts-grazing-guide-2012/>
- Practical Fly Control <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/practical-fly-control-2012/>
- Barrel and Mineral Feeder Construction Instructions <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/barrel-and-tire-mineral-feeder-construction-instructions-2008/>
- Picking Up After a Storm on Pasture-Based Livestock Farms <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/picking-up-after-the-storm-on-pasture-based-livestock-farms/>
- Webinars:



FAQ MANUAL FOR BEGINNING NICHE MEAT PRODUCERS¹

- Effective Use of Electric Fencing to Improve Grazing Management and Enhance Soil Health (2014) <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/effective-use-of-electric-fencing-to-improve-grazing-management-and-enhance-soil-health-2014/>
- Using Diverse Cover Crop Mixes to Improve Soil Health and Livestock Nutrition on Grazing Lands (2014) <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/using-diverse-cover-crop-mixes-to-improve-soil-health-and-livestock-nutrition-on-grazing-lands-2014/>
- Videos:
 - Make a Cattle Mineral Feeder <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/make-a-cattle-mineral-feeder-2008/?portfolioID=2967>
 - Grasslands and the Water Cycle <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/grasslands-and-the-water-cycle-2015/>

CEFS' Alternative Swine Resources

- Basics of Composting Poultry Litter and Swine Bedding (2010) <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/basics-of-composting-poultry-litter-and-swine-bedding-2010/>
- Conservation Practices in Outdoor Hog Production Systems: Findings and Recommendations from the Center for Environmental Farming Systems <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/conservation-practices-in-outdoor-hog-production-systems-findings-and-recommendations-2012/>
- Designing Pasture Subdivisions for Practical Management of Hogs (2015) <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/designing-pasture-subdivisions-for-practical-management-of-hogs-2015/>
- Environmentally-Friendly Outdoor Pig Production In North Carolina (2009) <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/environmentally-friendly-outdoor-pig-production-in-north-carolina-2009/>
- Ten Ideas for Improving Resource Management on Your Outdoor Hog Operation <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/10-ideas-for-improving-resource-management-in-outdoor-hog-production-2010/>
- Importance of Ground Cover Maintenance in Pasture Swine Operations <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/importance-of-ground-cover-maintenance-in-pasture-swine-operations/>
- Nutrient Management in Pasture-Based Swine Operations <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/nutrient-management-in-pasture-based-swine-operations/>
- Nutrient and Vegetation Management in Outdoor Hog Production Systems (2014) <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/nutrient-and-vegetation-management-in-outdoor-hog-production-systems-2014/>
- Outdoor Hog Management Assessment Tool (2010) <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/outdoor-hog-management-assessment-tool-2010/>

Support for this FAQ sheet is provided in part by

