

There is a small but growing interest in raising and selling meat rabbits in Washington. With the proper license or permit, a farmer can sell their rabbit meat to retail outlets such as restaurants, grocery stores, and farmers markets; wholesale; or to customers straight from the farm. Restaurants featuring locally sourced foods or French or European fare are potential markets for rabbit meat. To sell and process rabbit, producers must have a WSDA Food Processor License.

**This fact sheet includes information on:**

- Overview of requirements to sell rabbit meat
- How to get a WSDA Food Processor License
- Processing rabbit in existing WSDA-licensed food processing facilities
- Health department requirements for selling rabbit meat
- Helpful resources on rabbit processing

**Please note:** Information in this fact sheet is our best understanding of the current laws and regulations at the time of publication. If there is a conflict between what is written and what is contained in law, the applicable law prevails. Laws and regulations also are subject to change. Please refer to the contacts listed for the most up-to-date information.



## Overview of Requirements to Sell Rabbit Meat

Rabbit meat can be sold within Washington State when slaughtered and processed at a WSDA-licensed food processing facility. With the applicable local health department retail permits, rabbit meat processed by a WSDA-licensed food processor can be sold through a variety of marketing channels, including direct to customers on the farm, at farmers markets and farm stands, as well as to restaurants, grocery stores, , and wholesale outlets. The Food Processor License allows rabbit to be processed and sold fresh or frozen, whole or broken down into individual cuts (“parted out”), or processed into value-added

products like sausage. There is no limit on the number of rabbits per year that may be processed with this license.

Farmers may operate their own WSDA-licensed food processing facility or pay an existing food processing facility that is licensed to process animals for them.

Note: USDA inspection may also be available for rabbit processing.


## How to Get a WSDA Food Processor License

To process rabbits in their own facility, producers need a WSDA Food Processor License. You must submit an application to the WSDA Food Safety Program. It is available on the WSDA website. Search for it by name at [agr.wa.gov](http://agr.wa.gov), or contact the Food Safety Program, 360- 902-1876 or [foodsafety@agr.wa.gov](mailto:foodsafety@agr.wa.gov). The Food Processor License application includes a sanitation schedule, intended type of process (#12 is rabbit butchering), ingredient/processing information, a floor plan of where you will be processing rabbit, proposed labeling, questions about your water supply, and testing. Allow plenty of time to have your facility’s water system approved, because this can take weeks or months.

## Facility Requirements

Those familiar with poultry processing may be aware that a “pass-through” window is used in many WSDA poultry processing facilities. This is where the slaughter occurs outside the processing facility and the carcass is passed through a window into the facility for processing. This pass-through window may not be required for rabbit if a sanitary means of getting the slaughtered rabbit into the facility can be demonstrated—for example, when slaughtered rabbits are plunged into an ice bath and then transported into the facility.

For additional information about the WSDA processing facility requirements, please see the fact sheets “Selling and Processing Poultry” and “WSDA Food Processor License and Facilities”.



It is strongly advised that you to contact the WSDA Food Safety Program before you finalize the design of your food processing facility and start investing in equipment and materials. The WSDA Food Safety Program is available for one-on-one technical assistance with the licensing process, including creating a processing facility design and advising on construction materials, equipment, cooling procedures, water source, and food safety techniques to prevent cross-contamination of rabbit products.

Once the Food Safety Program reviews your application, a WSDA food safety inspector will contact you within four to six weeks. The inspector will need to inspect your processing site to ensure it meets all the state requirements.

The WSDA Food Processor License annual fee is based on your projected sales volume. It starts at \$92 per year for gross sales up to \$50,000.

### Processing Rabbit in Existing WSDA-Licensed Food Processing Facilities

Rabbit may be processed in an existing WSDA licensed food processing facility if adequate time and separation from other processing activities can be demonstrated. This may be of particular benefit to producers already processing poultry under a WSDA Food Processor License. Contact the WSDA Food Safety Program and request to add "rabbit" to the list of products processed on the facility's license. Please contact WSDA before making any changes to your facility or starting to process rabbit. This will help ensure that you are in full compliance with the food safety regulations for processing and labeling.

A WSDA-licensed food processing facility can process rabbits for other producers. The food industry term for this is "co-packer." This co-packer should carry insurance, and usually charges per unit. Labeling on these products must disclose the physical street address or other acceptable contact information for the co-packer. Producers may choose to include the words: "Manufactured for..." or "Distributed by..." to designate the co-packer's relation to the product.

### Health Department Requirements for Selling Rabbit Meat

Producers who are direct marketing rabbit need to find out what permits are required by the local health jurisdiction where they will be selling rabbit meat. If you are selling in Seattle, you will need to check with Seattle-King County Public Health. In Tacoma, it is Tacoma-Pierce County Public Health. In most other areas, the local jurisdiction will be the county health department. In Spokane, it is the Spokane Regional Health District. A list of local health jurisdiction offices can be found by searching the Washington Department of Health website, [doh.wa.gov](http://doh.wa.gov).

All local health jurisdictions adopt the same Washington State Retail Food Code, but permitting structure, fees and inspections vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In addition, the local health jurisdiction may add requirements beyond the Retail Food Code.

### Farmers markets

Local health jurisdictions permit and inspect retail operations, including farm stands and temporary food establishments like farmers markets. Farmers markets require that rabbit meat vendors have all the required state and local permits needed to sell in that county.

Producers should check with the farmers market manager and health department early on to find out what is required. Questions to ask your local health jurisdiction include:

- ✓ What permit(s) are required for producers to sell rabbit at a farmers market?
- ✓ Are fresh rabbit meat sales allowed? Or does it need to be frozen?
- ✓ What temperature needs to be maintained?
- ✓ Can producers use coolers, or is mechanical refrigeration required? If refrigeration or a freezer is needed, be sure to ask the market manager about the electricity and voltage available at the market site.
- ✓ Is a separate permit required for each market site or each day?

- ✓ How much does the permit cost? They may range significantly, anywhere from \$25 to \$900 per season.
- ✓ When are permits due or required to be renewed?

## Helpful Resources on Rabbit Processing

- The National Sustainable Agricultural Information Service, [attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org), has helpful resources on rabbit production, including the publication “Small Scale Rabbit Production.”
- The Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network, [nichemeatprocessing.org](http://nichemeatprocessing.org), is an excellent resource for small-scale meat processing in general.



- 20. Organic Certification
- 21. Eco-labels, Animal Welfare and Fair Trade Certifications
- 23. WSDA Food Processor License and Facilities
- 25. Food Product Recalls
- 27. Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, Goat, and Other Meat
- 46. Selling Poultry