

Growing consumer demand for locally grown, humanely raised, organic, and pastured meat creates new opportunities for small-scale producers of chicken, turkey, and other poultry. Careful planning and a good understanding of the regulations surrounding the processing, handling, and marketing of poultry meat is essential. With the proper license or permit, a producer can sell their poultry meat to retail outlets such as restaurants, grocery stores, and farmers markets; wholesale; or straight from the farm. This fact sheet is designed to help poultry producers understand Washington State regulations and to provide resources for a successful poultry enterprise.

This fact sheet includes information on:

- Overview of poultry processing permits and licenses.
- WSDA Special Poultry Permit.
- WSDA Food Processor License.
- WSDA poultry processing facility and water requirements.
- Poultry processing equipment lending programs.
- Mobile poultry processing units.
- USDA-inspected poultry processing facilities.
- Ratites—ostrich, emu, rhea.
- Health department requirements for selling poultry.
- Additional resources.

Please note: Information in this fact sheet is our best understanding of the current state 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.



Going through the process of getting the proper permit or license to process and sell poultry takes perseverance, but the following benefits make the investment worthwhile.

Opening up new marketing alternatives. With the proper permit or license, you may legally sell to customers at your farm, to restaurants, to grocery stores, or farmers markets, via the internet (in-state only), and other direct and wholesale marketing channels.

Capturing more value for your poultry meat. By selling through direct markets, producers capture the full retail value of their poultry, often at a premium price, increasing profits.

Building customer trust and loyalty. By acquiring the appropriate licenses, you can demonstrate to customers that you are following all state regulations and food safety practices that promote a safe, quality product.

Reducing business risk. In order for your product liability insurance to be valid, your carrier will require you to be properly licensed. Being licensed also enables you to advertise without worrying about regulatory repercussions.

Influencing agricultural policies in Washington State. Being licensed creates an opportunity for direct feedback to state agencies, so they can improve rules to better serve farmers and consumers alike. The more producers that are licensed, the greater their voice becomes in the policy arena. In addition, as a producer you have a responsibility to other producers to maintain a legal and safe infrastructure to protect both the public and your rights to continue processing.

Overview of Poultry Processing Permits and Licenses

Poultry processing in the United States, including chicken, geese, duck, turkey, and other domesticated birds raised for meat, is regulated by the Federal Poultry Products Inspection Act. This act requires producers to process poultry in a USDA-inspected facility. However, under the act, state exemptions are allowed.

REGULATIONS FOR SPECIFIC PRODUCTS

In Washington State, there are currently two ways that small-scale poultry producers may be exempted from processing poultry in a USDA-inspected facility:

1. With a WSDA Special Poultry Permit.
2. With a WSDA Food Processor License.

Poultry Processing Options

	WSDA SPECIAL POULTRY PERMIT	WSDA FOOD PROCESSOR LICENSE	USDA-INSPECTED FACILITY
What is the allowed maximum number of birds processed per year?	Up to 1,000	Up to 20,000	Unlimited
What can be sold? Whole or processed (cuts, frozen, etc.)	Whole only	Whole or processed	Whole or processed
Marketing options?	At-farm sales only, within 48 hours	Direct, retail or wholesale	Direct, retail or wholesale
Are out-of-state sales allowed?	No	No	Yes

Which Permit or License do I need?

The following four questions can help you figure out if you need a WSDA Specialty Poultry Permit or Food Processor License:

- How many birds will you process in a calendar year?
- Do you want to sell whole birds only?
- Do you want to sell to retail markets such as restaurants, grocery stores, at farmers markets or wholesale?
- Do you want to sell outside of Washington State?

Please note that the Special Poultry Permit is for poultry only. To process other products, a WSDA Food Processing License is needed, which allows you to process poultry—and other products. If approved, a WSDA Food Processing License can be formally amended to include processing of rabbits, buffalo, and beefalo, for in-state sales—and out-of-state sales, if the receiving state accepts non-USDA inspected processed exotic meats.

WSDA Special Poultry Permit

Farms selling less than 1,000 processed poultry of any species in a calendar year may operate with a WSDA Special Poultry Permit, as long as they meet all requirements, including these three key conditions:

1. Poultry must be sold directly to the end consumer. Selling processed poultry at farmers markets, direct to restaurants or grocery stores,

or shipping processed birds through the mail or other delivery service is not allowed

2. Customers must pick up the birds within 48 hours of slaughter from the property of the Washington farm where the poultry was raised and processed.
3. The farm business must sell only whole birds. This permit does not allow further processing (parting out, vacuum sealing, or freezing).

The WSDA Food Safety Program's online "Handbook for Special Poultry Permit to Slaughter, Prepare and Sell Whole Raw Poultry" is a useful resource that includes over twenty FAQs covering everything from recordkeeping to composting offal. Search for it by name at agr.wa.gov.

How to Get a WSDA Special Poultry Permit

Contact WSDA's Food Safety Program and discuss your plans with an inspector. Food safety inspectors can help ensure that the processing setup and practices meet state standards. You must submit an application to the WSDA Food Safety Program. Applying early will give inspectors time to work with you. To avoid a backlog, we recommend applying at least 12 weeks before your first slaughter date and obtaining the permit at least 6 weeks before your first slaughter date. Applications and additional information is available on the WSDA website by searching for "Special Poultry Permit" or contacting 360 -902-1876, foodsafety@agr.wa.gov.

For many, the most challenging aspect of the application is the “Slaughter/Preparation Site Diagram” and “Detailed Processing Steps or Flow Diagram.” To avoid potential confusion on your food safety application, be sure to include as much detail in these diagrams as possible. The major steps involved (kill, scald, pluck, eviscerate, rinse, and chill) must be included in the flow charts, and any additional details will help to ensure a smooth licensing process.

Once the Food Safety Program has received your Special Poultry Permit application, a trained WSDA food safety inspector will come to the farm prior to first slaughter to verify that the setup, slaughter, and processing is done in compliance with state food safety requirements. Inspections include an evaluation of personnel, grounds, butcher setup construction and design, sanitary operations, pest control, sanitary facilities and controls, equipment and utensils, labeling, and licensing. Preventing overhead contamination, having food-grade surfaces, and chilling tend to be the key areas of concern.

We recommend scheduling your food safety inspection on a day when you can do a dry run. You do not need all equipment to be present if, for example, you are renting a plucker or scalding. Not having customers on the farm the day of your inspection gives you time to address any issues. Once approved, the permit will be mailed to you.

The inspector returns on the first slaughter date during processing to confirm all food safety requirements are met.

Please note: the permit application asks for your projected slaughter dates. Changes are allowed. However, you must provide prior written communication of any changes, including date additions and deletions, to the Food Safety Program at least one week before the change.

The fee for the Special Poultry Permit is \$75 for one calendar year or \$125 for two years. The permit is good from date of application approval and expires December 31.

WSDA Food Processor License

There are three main reasons a farm would need a WSDA Food Processor License, instead of a Special Poultry Permit, to process poultry. If the farm’s plans meet **any one** of these criteria, then a WSDA Food Processor License is required.

1. The farm is planning to process between 1,001 and 19,999 birds a year.
2. The farm wants to sell directly off-farm at a farmers market or farm stand, or sell through a third party to retail markets.
3. The farm wants to sell poultry that is not a whole bird or has been processed further in any way (frozen, cut into pieces, used in a value-added product such as sausage, broth, etc.).

The WSDA Food Processor License allows farms to process up to 19,999 poultry of any combination of species per calendar year. If you choose, you are allowed to process less than 1,000 with the Food Processor License.

One of the key benefits of the Food Processor License is it allows farms to sell processed poultry directly at farmers markets, on the internet (in-state only), to hotels, restaurants, food service institutions, grocery stores, or through wholesale food distribution in Washington State.

The Food Processor License allows poultry to be further processed, for example breaking down the whole bird into individual cuts (“parted out”), vacuum sealing, and freezing.

The WSDA Food Processor License does not allow out-of-state sales of poultry.

How to Get a WSDA Food Processor License

Like the Specialty Poultry Permit, producers should start by contacting the WSDA Food Safety Program to discuss plans. You must submit an application to the WSDA Food Safety Program, which is available on the WSDA website. Search for it by name at agr.wa.gov or contact the Food Safety Program, 360- 902-1876, foodsafety@agr.wa.gov. The Food Processor License application includes a sanitation schedule, intended type of process (#12 is poultry butchering), ingredient/processing information, a floor plan of where you will be processing poultry, proposed labeling, questions about your water supply and testing.

Allow plenty of time for getting your facility’s water system approved, because this can take weeks or months.

REGULATIONS FOR SPECIFIC PRODUCTS

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 poultry products.

Once the Food Safety Program reviews your application, a WSDA food safety inspector will contact you within 4 to 6 weeks. They will need to inspect your processing site to ensure it meets all state requirements and to answer any questions.

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

WSDA Food Processor License Fee Schedule

GROSS ANNUAL SALES* FROM PRODUCTS PROCESSED IN FACILITY	LICENSE FEE
\$0 to \$50,000	\$92
\$50,001 to \$500,000	\$147
\$500,001 to \$1,000,000	\$262
\$1,000,001 to \$5,000,000	\$585.
\$5,000,001 to \$10,000,000	\$427
Greater than \$10,000,000	\$862

* In year 1 of an operation, gross annual sales are the processor's projected sales. Thereafter, fees are based on the processor's prior year's sales.

WSDA Poultry Processing Facility and Water Requirements

The Special Poultry Permit and Food Processor License have the same sanitation and cooling, and refrigeration requirements; however, the requirements for the processing facilities, lighting, bathrooms, and water (from private wells) are different. The following tables outline some the requirements of each.

Facility, Lighting, Bathroom and Water Requirements for the Special Poultry Permit

WSDA SPECIAL POULTRY PERMIT

Facilities No permanent building is required. Protection from overhead, side, and ground contamination is required, when necessary. When insects, dust, mud, pests, or other contamination is likely to occur, a temporary setup including tarps, canopies, floor mats, etc., may be used. A grassy, clean and pesticide-free pasture could qualify. If there is no potential for overhead/ground contamination, the entire slaughter, processing, and bagging operation could occur in the open.

At least one handwashing station must be accessible on site. Standard temporary handwashing stations are acceptable.

Lighting Lighting needs to be provided only if processing is done at night or in low-light conditions.

Bathroom At least one toilet must be available and conveniently located at the poultry slaughter site. bathroom in a home or a portable chemical toilet may qualify.

Water Public or municipal water supplies must meet requirements for potable water. If you are on a private well, the local or county health department or Washington State Department of Health (DOH) must approve the water source. Water source approval means the conveyance used to deliver the water must meet DOH requirements for potable water.

Potable water may be hauled into the processing site as long as the water is safe and sanitary. The transport vessel that is used must be capable of maintaining the sanitary quality of the water. In addition to being potable, water must pass a bacterial test within the 60-day window prior to applying for the permit.

Please see Attachment C "Water Supply Requirements" of the Special Poultry Permit application for detailed information.

Facility, Lighting, Bathroom and Water Requirements for the Food Processor License

WSDA FOOD PROCESSOR LICENSE

Facilities Licensed food processors must have a separate facility dedicated to only the commercial processing operation. Your home kitchen cannot serve as this facility; however, a separate processing facility may be located in your home in a room separate from your domestic kitchen, (e.g., a converted bedroom, or basement).

Slaughtering and plucking may occur outdoors in a covered area. All other steps in the processing must occur indoors. Specific requirements include:

- Equipment, worktables, and counters must be in good repair and have surfaces that are easily cleaned and non-corrosive.
- Floors must be made of material that can be cleaned and must be in good repair. Typically, vinyl linoleum or tile floor coverings are sufficient for small operations where vacuuming and wet mopping provide sufficient cleanup. Unfinished wood floors are NOT suitable in any areas.
- Walls must be covered with a washable, non-porous, non-corrosive, smooth material that will not deteriorate when it gets wet.

Sinks may be three-compartment or two-compartment; please check with your inspector. Food handlers must have access to one or more handwashing facilities with hot and cold running water, soap, single service towels, and handwashing signs.

Lighting Adequate lighting must be provided. Shatter-proof protection must be used above equipment or areas where food is exposed.

Bathroom An adequate home bathroom is sufficient if only family members work in the processing facility. When a processor hires anyone outside of the immediate family to process poultry, then a separate bathroom is required.

Water Public or municipal water supplies meet requirements for potable water. If you are on a private well, you must meet Washington State Department of Health's requirements for a Group A or B water system. The system required will depend on the number of employees and the number of days you operate.

Please see Attachment E "Water Supply Testing Requirements" of the Food Processor License application for detailed information.

Sanitary practices for both Specialty Poultry Permit and Food Processor License

Handwashing is critical to food safety, regardless of your permit or license. Wash hands thoroughly before starting and between each preparation step, as well as after every break. At least one handwashing station must be accessible on the site.

Cooling and refrigeration requirements for both Special Poultry Permit and Food Processor License

Under the Special Poultry Permit, a temperature control must be used to monitor slaughter cool-down temperatures that ensure proper chilling. A calibrated

thermometer inserted into the first bird slaughtered and then monitored will work. You must record this cooling time. Processed poultry must be cooled to 45° Fahrenheit within four hours of slaughter, unless they are sold within four hours.

Producers will need to demonstrate the availability and efficiency of their equipment—coolers, boxes, refrigerators, etc.—for cooling, storage, and transport prior to permit or license approval (refer to WAC 16-170-175 for specific cooling and refrigeration requirements). In addition, the food processor licensees' freezers will be checked.

Co-packing under the WSDA Food Processor License.

The Poultry Products Inspection Act's (PPIA) "exemption to the exemption" can be requested by a WSDA-licensed facility to process birds from multiple producers (also known as co-packing). It states: "The facility used to slaughter or process the poultry is not used to slaughter or process another person's poultry unless the Administrator of FSIS grants an exemption [PPIA Section 464(c)(3); Title 9 CFR 381.10(b)(2)]."

The term "exempt" means that certain types of poultry slaughter and processing facilities may qualify to operate without daily federal inspection or a grant of federal inspection. Such facilities are exempt from continuous bird-by-bird inspection and the presence of inspectors during the slaughter of poultry and processing of poultry products.

However, a facility operating under such an exemption must still comply with all other requirements of the PPIA, and all facilities slaughtering or processing poultry for human use, including exempt operations, must produce products that are not adulterated or misbranded.

All poultry processed under any exemption of the PPIA and offered for sale must have a label with the producer's name, producer's address, and the statement, "Exempt P.L. 90-492." If the poultry is processed by another facility operating under this exemption, the label must state that the bird was processed by that facility and distributed by the producer of the bird.

Contact the WSDA Food Safety Program, 360-902-1876, with questions about co-packing with at WSDA Food Processor License.

To request an exemption to the PPIA, contact the regional USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service District Office in Denver at 303-236-9800 or fsis.usda.gov.

Poultry Processing Equipment Lending Programs

Several programs lend poultry processing equipment to producers in Washington for a small fee. Most of these programs provide a large, thermostatically controlled scalding, a drum picker or plucker, and kill cones. In most cases, the producer is required to provide propane, water, electricity, and all other required equipment. Below is a listing of some poultry processing equipment lending programs and contact information. Contact the local Conservation District or WSU County Extension to learn if there is a program in your area.

Island, Skagit, and Snohomish counties

Northwest Agriculture Business Center

agbizcenter.org

419 South 1st St., Ste. 200

Mt. Vernon, WA 98273-2924

360-336-3727

info@agbizcenter.org

King County

King Conservation District Equipment Share Program

kingcd.org

800 SW 39th St, Suite 150

Renton, WA 98057

425-282-1905

Kitsap County and surrounding region

Sunny Knoll Farm

360-509-1209

sunnyknollfarm@comcast.net

Lewis County

Lewis Conservation District

1554 Bishop Road

Chehalis, WA Renton, WA 98532

360-748-0083 x. 5

lewiscounty.cd.wordpress.com

Mason County and surrounding counties

Mason Conservation District

masoncd.org/equipment

450 W. Business Park Rd.

Shelton, WA 98584

360-427-9436

Pierce and surrounding counties

Pierce Conservation District Equipment Rental
pierced.org
 5430 66th Ave East
 Puyallup, WA 98371
 253-845-9770

Thurston and surrounding counties

Thurston Conservation District Working Lands
 Equipment Rental Program
thurstoncd.com
 2918 Ferguson St. SW, Building 1, Ste. A
 Tumwater, WA 98512
 360-754-3588

Stevens, Pend Oreille, Ferry, and Spokane counties

Community Agricultural Development Center and
 WSU Stevens County Extension.
 509-675-5574
pete@burntvalleyfarm.com

Whatcom County

Whatcom Conservation District Equipment Share
 Program
whatcomcd.org/equipment
 6975 Hannegan Rd.
 Lynden, WA 98264
 360-526-2381 x.104
ccheever@whatcomcd.org

Mobile Poultry Processing Units

Mobile poultry processing units (MPPUs) are allowed to operate in the state of Washington. MPPUs enable small producers to process poultry through a facility shared with other producers. The mobile unit must meet regulatory requirements for a WSDA licensed Food Processing facility. It must be fully enclosed; however, killing and plucking can occur under cover or outside the unit. Each producer using the MPPU must be a WSDA-licensed food processor, which means they can process up to 19,999 birds, each, per year.

North Eastern Washington

The first mobile poultry processing unit built in Washington was a joint project of the Community Agricultural Development Center (CADC) and WSU Stevens County Extension. The unit provides an opportunity for small-scale poultry producers to be WSDA licensed processors. It currently serves Stevens, Ferry, Pend Oreille and Spokane counties. For more information, call or text Pete Thompson with CADC at 509-675-5574 or email pete@burntvalleyfarm.com.

North Central Washington

Pine Stump Farms in the Okanogan manages a mobile poultry processing unit that was established in partnership with Slow Food Okanogan. Contact Pine Stump Farms for details at pinestumpfarms.com/meat or 509-322-8907.

The national Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network (NMPAN) is an excellent resource for learning more about MPPUs, nichemeatprocessing.org/mobile-unit-overview.

USDA-Inspected Poultry Processing Facilities

USDA inspection is required for businesses that slaughter and process 20,000 or more birds per year and/or sell their birds outside of Washington State. Please contact the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service for more information.

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service District Office (for Washington)

Denver Federal Center, PO Box 25387, Building 45,
 Denver, CO 80225, 303-236-9800 or fsis.usda.gov

The FSIS has a listing of USDA-inspected plants online that is updated monthly. Search for “Poultry Inspection Directory” from the FSIS home page. You should find a “Meat, Poultry and Egg Product Inspection Directory.” However, finding plants that serve independent producers is extremely challenging.

The “Guidance for Determining Whether a Poultry Slaughter or Processing Operation is Exempt from Inspection Requirements of the Poultry Products Inspection Act” is a helpful publication to understand federal inspection requirements and exemptions. Search for it by name on the FSIS website.

Ratites—Ostrich, Emu, Rhea

Large birds such as ostrich, emu, and rhea—collectively known as “ratites”—must be processed in USDA-inspected facilities. These processors must apply to the USDA FSIS for exemption from USDA inspection. In addition to standard product labeling requirements, each bird or package for sale must be marked or tagged, “Exempted under PL 90-492” and include the name and address of the processor. For more information, contact USDA FSIS, 303-236-9800, fsis.usda.gov.

Health Department Requirements for Selling Poultry

Producers who are direct marketing poultry will need to find out what permits are required by the local health jurisdiction where they will be selling poultry. 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.

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

The local health jurisdiction permits and inspects retail operations including farm stands and temporary food establishments like farmers markets. Farmers markets require that poultry vendors have the required state and all 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 include:

- ✓ What permit(s) are required for producers to sell poultry at a farmers market?
- ✓ Are fresh poultry sales allowed? Or does all poultry 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?

Additional Resources

- American Pastured Poultry Producers Association, apppa.org
- Featherman Equipment How To Videos, feathermanequipment.com
- "ATTRA" National Center for Appropriate Technology, attra.ncat.org/poultry/
- Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network, nichemeatprocessing.org
- Cornell University Small Farms publications, "On-Farm Poultry Slaughter Guidelines" and "Guide to Direct Marketing Livestock and Poultry," smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources
- WSU Puyallup Movable Pastured Poultry Cage Plans, puyallup.wsu.edu
- WSDA Farm Wisdom Videos, youtube.com/WSDAgov
"Poultry Processing Rental Equipment"
"WSDA Licensed Poultry Processing Facilities"
- WSDA Food Safety Program and WSDA Organic Program, agr.wa.gov



5. Licensing

20. Organic Certification

21. Eco-labels, Animal Welfare and Fair Trade Certifications

23. WSDA Food Processor License and Facilities

27. Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, Goat, and Other Meat

30. Selling Eggs

47. Selling Rabbit Meat

This fact sheet was first developed in 2009 as part of the "Realizing the Potential of Pastured Poultry in our Local Food System" project of WSU Mason County Extension and Mason Conservation District, WSDA, The Evergreen State College Organic Farm, Homegrown Pastures, and Heifer International with contributions from Melissa Barker, Patrice Barrentine, Andy Bary, Fred Berman, Carey Hunter, Al Kowitz, Nate Lewis, and Kirsten Workman.
