



## ALASKA RIGHTRISK NEWS

### Alaska Meat Processing: What Livestock Producers Need to Know

**L**ivestock producers in Alaska who want to sell meat products directly to consumers, restaurants, and other establishments must navigate a set of regulations designed to ensure food safety and public health. This guide provides an overview of the regulatory requirements, processing infrastructure, and logistical considerations for livestock producers developing a direct-to-consumer meat business in Alaska.

#### The Foundation: Federal Meat Inspection Act and Meat Inspection Categories

Meat intended for human consumption can be harvested, processed, and further fabricated in three types of facilities: federally inspected, state inspected, and custom-exempt processing plants.

##### Federal and State Inspection

The Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA) establishes the framework for livestock processing, implemented by the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). Meat processed in federally inspected facilities can be sold across state lines and internationally if export certified (see Title 21 U.S.C. § 661). These facilities must meet rigorous standards, including:

- Continuous inspection during all processing stages.
- Comprehensive Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans for food safety.
- Strict facility design and sanitation requirements (see FSIS Directive 5000.1).

The State of Alaska operates an equivalent inspection program, meaning state-inspected plants must meet the same standards as federally inspected facilities (see 18 AAC 31.770). The key difference is that meat from state-inspected plants can only be sold within Alaska. One challenge of both federal and state inspection is the requirement for an inspector to be present during all harvesting, processing, and packaging activities, which can add to processing costs.



Table 1: Meat Processing Inspection Comparison

	Federal Inspection	State Inspection	Custom Exempt
Marketing Range	Interstate/International	Intrastate	Personal Use Only
Ownership	Not required	Not Required	Required
Inspector Requirements	Continuous	Continuous	Periodic Review
Documentation Level	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Basic
Livestock Handled	All	All	All, Including Game
Typical Costs	\$\$\$	\$\$	\$

##### Custom-Exempt Processing

Custom-exempt processing allows individuals to have their livestock processed for personal consumption without commercial inspection requirements. While continuous inspection is not required, facilities must still follow sanitation and record-keeping regulations.

The key principle of custom processing is ownership—the individual must own the animal before it arrives at the processing facility. All packages must be labeled “NOT FOR SALE”, include the processor’s name and address, and specify the meat type. This meat cannot be sold to consumers, restaurants, or at farmers’ markets, nor can it be shipped across state lines.

#### Livestock Subject to Inspection

The USDA inspection requirements differ for animals that are required to be inspected and animals that can be voluntarily inspected. Mandatory inspection of animals occurs for include cattle, sheep, swine, goats, and equine. Inspection can be used for deer, elk, bison, buffalo, and antelope. Mandatory inspection is always included in the cost to process livestock. However, Voluntary inspection requires producers to pay an additional fee for these inspection services. Inspection is always mandated by law if you wish to sell the meat commercially.

How Much Risk is Right for You?

## Processing Features Unique to Alaska

Alaska's meat processing sector faces unique environmental and cultural challenges, leading to specific regulations for reindeer meat and subsistence-harvested meat.

### Reindeer Meat Regulations

Reindeer meat holds cultural and economic significance in Alaska. However, due to food safety concerns, reindeer can only be slaughtered when outdoor temperatures are at or below 32°F with sufficient snow cover to prevent contamination. Additional regulations include:

- Carcasses must be covered during transport and immediately frozen.
- Processing must occur separately from other meats to prevent cross-contamination.
- All equipment must be sanitized before and after processing.
- Packages must be labeled: "NOT AN INSPECTED PRODUCT. REINDEER MUST BE COOKED TO AN INTERNAL TEMPERATURE OF 165°F OR ABOVE" (see 18 AAC 31.820).

These requirements help maintain food safety and protect public health.

### Subsistence and Personal Use Meat Processing

Meat harvested from subsistence hunting is intended for personal or community use. Selling, bartering, or trading game meat is illegal in Alaska, with penalties ranging from fines of \$2,000 to \$10,000 and potential jail time.

Although there are no specific processing regulations for subsistence meat, best practices are encouraged:

- Proper field dressing to maintain meat quality.
- Sanitary processing conditions to prevent contamination.
- Appropriate storage to reduce spoilage.

Meat may be gifted, but it must be in equal or better condition than what the harvester would keep for themselves.

## Plant Locations and Services

Your ability to process livestock depends largely on proximity to a processing facility. Currently, Alaska has very few federally inspected meat processing plants, and scheduling slots can be limited.

The USDA FSIS Meat, Poultry, and Egg Product Inspection Directory lists all licensed processing facilities in Alaska (<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/inspection/establishments>). Facilities vary in:

- Species they handle (cattle, pork, sheep, etc.).
- Processing services offered (slaughter, further processing, voluntary inspections).
- Processing volume and scheduling flexibility.

Before selecting a facility, ensure it meets your business's specific processing needs.

### Processing Timeline and Logistics

Scheduling livestock processing requires careful advance planning:

- Peak season (fall/winter): Wait times can range from 6 to 12 months.
- Off-season (spring/summer): Processing slots may open within a few weeks to a month.

Since weather, feed quality, and animal health can affect livestock readiness, it's wise to schedule processing slots well in advance—ideally before raising the livestock.



**Table 2. Federally Inspected Livestock Meat Processing Plants in Alaska**

Company	City	Size	Volume		Activities	Slaughter					
			Processed	Slaughter		B	P	S	G	L	O
						e	o	h	o	a	t
						r	e	e	a	m	e
						e	k	p	b	e	r
AK's Midstate Meats, LLC	North Pole	Very Small	2	1	Meat Slaughter, Meat Processing, Voluntary Slaughter - Exotic, Voluntary Slaughter - Meat, Voluntary Processing - Exotic, Voluntary Processing - Meat	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Alaska Meat Packers Incorporated; Alaska Meat; Alaska Meat Packers Inc.	Palmer	Very Small	3	1	Meat Slaughter, Meat Processing, Poultry Processing, Voluntary Slaughter - Meat, Voluntary Processing - Meat	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Delta Meat & Sausage Co.	Delta Junction	Very Small	2	1	Meat Slaughter, Meat Processing, Voluntary Slaughter - Exotic, Voluntary Slaughter - Meat, Voluntary Processing - Meat	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y

### Livestock Delivery & Processing

Processing plants have specific livestock delivery requirements based on:

- Facility capacity and staffing.
- Weather conditions (Alaska's climate can disrupt transportation).
- Processing schedule.

Most facilities prefer animals to arrive the day before slaughter, ensuring they have water but no feed. Some allow same-day processing.

### Processing Timeline

- Cooling period (before butchering): 2-21 days.
- Butchering & packaging: Typically 1 day.
- Value-added processing (e.g., smoked meats): 2-14 days, depending on the product.



Extreme cold and spring breakup can complicate transportation and scheduling, so it's best to allow at least two weeks of flexibility in your timeline.

### Processing Costs

There are two primary costs associated with meat processing:

1. Livestock cost – Who pays depends on the direct-to-consumer model.
2. Processing cost – Varies based on livestock species, facility type, and services requested.

### Who Pays for Processing?

• If selling individual meat cuts, the producer pays for processing at a federally or state-inspected facility.

- If selling whole, half, or quarter animals, the customer buys the animal from the producer and pays the processor separately.

### Processing Cost Breakdown

- Harvesting fees: \$50-\$250 per head, depending on species and additional services.
- Inspection fees: Included for mandatory species; extra for voluntary inspections.
- Disposal fees: Covers carcass, fat, and byproduct disposal.

Producers should consider these costs when setting meat prices and choosing a business model.

### Additional Resources

These regulations serve to ensure food safety and protect public health. Livestock producers building a direct-to-consumer meat program will need to understand and follow them. For additional help, here are a list of Alaska-based individuals or organizations you can contact for specific questions:

#### USDA Inspection

- Dr. Robert Reeder – USDA-FSIS, District Manager 15 | (303) 236-9788 | robert.reeder@usda.gov

#### State Regulations

- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation – Food Safety & Sanitation | 907-269-7501
- Alaska Grown Program | 907-745-7200 | dnr.alaskagrown@alaska.gov

#### Industry Organizations

- Alaska Food Systems Network: [www.alaskafoodsyste.ms.com](http://www.alaskafoodsyste.ms.com)
- National Agricultural Law Center: [www.nationalaglawcenter.org](http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org)
- Alaska Farm Bureau: <https://alaskaafb.org/>
- Alaska Food Policy Council: <https://www.akfoodpolicycouncil.org/>
- Intertribal Agriculture Council: <https://www.indianag.org/alaska>



*RightRisk helps decision-makers discover innovative and effective risk management solutions*

RightRisk News is brought to you by the RightRisk Team

#### Contributing authors:

Elliott Dennis, Livestock Marketing specialist Specialist - University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [elliott.dennis@unl.edu](mailto:elliott.dennis@unl.edu)  
 John Hewlett, Ranch/Farm Management Specialist - University of Wyoming, [hewlett@uwyo.edu](mailto:hewlett@uwyo.edu)  
 Jay Parsons, Risk Management Specialist - University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [jparsons4@unl.edu](mailto:jparsons4@unl.edu)  
 Jeff Tranel, Ag and Business Management Specialist - Colorado State University, [Jeffrey.Tranel@ColoState.edu](mailto:Jeffrey.Tranel@ColoState.edu)

**Editing and Layout:** John Hewlett, [hewlett@uwyo.edu](mailto:hewlett@uwyo.edu)

Past issues of RightRisk News are available at: [RightRisk.org/News](http://RightRisk.org/News)  
 To subscribe/unsubscribe, email [information@RightRisk.org](mailto:information@RightRisk.org)  
 subject line "Subscribe/Unsubscribe RR News"

- *Education*
- *Coaching*
- *Research*

E-mail: [information@RightRisk.org](mailto:information@RightRisk.org)  
 Web: [www.RightRisk.org](http://www.RightRisk.org)

*How much risk is right for you and your operation?*



**N EXTENSION**  
 COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY  
 EXTENSION

