



Farm-to-Consumer
Legal Defense Fund®

Updating On-Farm Slaughter Regulations The LOCAL Foods Act (S. 1212/H.R. 5341)



Photo courtesy of Rural Vermont

The Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), enacted in 1906, regulates the slaughtering and processing of meat and meat products. It includes a “personal-use” exemption that allows the person who raises an animal to slaughter it without inspection for restricted purposes.

The FMIA bases its personal-use exemption on who raised an animal instead of who owns an animal. This means that farmers are allowed to raise, slaughter, and butcher their animals for their own use without inspection. The resulting meat products cannot be sold to customers.

Currently, farmers and homesteaders selling livestock for on-farm slaughter by itinerant slaughterers (e.g., a mobile butcher) rely on 2018 guidance provided by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which bases eligibility for the personal-use exemption on who owns the animal. This has given consumers who want access to local meat the ability to purchase a live animal (in whole or in shares) before it is slaughtered, use the personal-use exemption to hire an agent to conduct an on-farm slaughter without federal inspection, and receive the resulting meat products.

Based on that FSIS guidance, 27 states allow livestock owners to designate an agent to assist in the on-farm slaughter or transportation of their livestock, and to use that meat without state or federal inspection. But guidance documents lack the surety and authority that a statutory change would bring. The USDA can change the guidance document at any time and impact Americans across the country without any formal process.

The bipartisan Livestock Owned by Communities to Advance Local (LOCAL) Foods Act (S.1212/H.R. 5341) updates the Federal Meat Inspection Act to reflect current state laws that base the personal-use exemption on ownership and will protect farmers, itinerant slaughterers, and their customers!



It's time for an update to the Federal Meat Inspection Act that will clarify and protect modern standards for on-farm slaughter! **The LOCAL Foods Act (S.1212/H.R. 5341) revises the FMIA to reflect current FSIS guidance and state laws and ensure that livestock owners, livestock producers, custom processors and itinerant slaughterers have permanent protection to practice on-farm slaughter in accordance with state laws.** The Act clarifies the outdated FMIA language that bases the personal-use exemption on who "raised" the animals, replacing it with language grounded in "ownership" and common law principles, including the ability to use agents and the ability to assume risk.

Updating the Federal Meat Inspection Act by passing the LOCAL Foods Act will:

- Relieve pressure on backlogged slaughterhouses and lower transportation costs and emissions.
- Improve animal welfare as family-scale farmers are able to raise livestock more humanely, and livestock does not face the stress of transportation to slaughter.
- Meet the demand for local meat by offering more slaughtering options, and enhance farm viability, local market connections, and food security.
- Provide clarity and certainty for state meat inspection programs operating in accordance with FMIA statutory and regulatory provisions.

The LOCAL Foods Act is an important opportunity for bipartisan legislative support for farm viability and local food markets. Until this change is made, farmers and consumers are vulnerable to agency discretion, and state laws in support of the personal-use exemption can be effectively nullified, putting these pathways towards farm viability and food security at risk. Farmers and ranchers need to feel confident that they are complying with slaughtering regulations, are secure in planning their business, and are guaranteed the right to continue this long-standing practice.

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