



Updating On-Farm Slaughter Regulations

Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA)

The Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), enacted in 1906 and last updated in 1989, 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 the animals instead of who owns them. 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.



Photo by Rural Vermont.

Current Standards for Personal Use

Currently, farmers and homesteaders selling livestock for on-farm slaughter by itinerant slaughterers all rely on on guidance provided by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) in 2018, which bases the personal-use exemption on *ownership*. **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.**

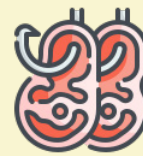
But guidance documents don’t bind even the USDA officials, some of whom have threatened states with revocation of approval of their state meat inspection programs for activities that fall within that guidance document. Moreover, the USDA can change the guidance document at any time and impact Americans across the country without any formal process.

Updating the Federal Meat Inspection Act to reflect current state laws that base the personal-use exemption on ownership will protect farmers, itinerant slaughterers, and their customers!

Personal Use Based on Ownership



Customer purchases a living animal from a farmer, and contracts that farmer to raise the animal.



The customer contracts a professional slaughterer and/or butcher to process the animal, without inspection.



The customer is able to take home and enjoy their locally raised meat!



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It's time for an update to the Federal Meat Inspection Act that will clarify and protect modern standards for on-farm slaughter! **The FMIA should be revised to reflect current FSIS guidance and state laws and ensure that livestock owners, livestock producers, and itinerant slaughterers have permanent protection to practice on-farm slaughter in accordance with state laws.**

This amendment 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 risks.



Benefits to Updating the Federal Meat Inspection Act:



Relieves pressure on backlogged slaughterhouses and lowers transportation costs and emissions



Improves animal welfare as family-scale farmers are able to raise livestock more humanely, and livestock does not face the stress of transportation to slaughter.



Meets the demand for local meat by offering more slaughtering options, and enhances farm viability, local market connections, and food security.



Provides clarity and certainty for state meat inspection programs operating in accordance with FMIA statutory and regulatory provisions.

This regulatory change is an important opportunity for 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.