

Meeting the Custom Exempt Operations Requirements

GUIDANCE AND CHECKLIST

This document summarizes some of the key considerations and requirements for new custom exempt meat processing businesses and will help you obtain a license and permit with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Meat and Poultry Inspection Program. As with any business, the steps may involve consultation with both local and state entities. This list is not all inclusive; additional steps may be required based on local, city, or county ordinances. This document can also provide guidance for processors who are already operating but are not yet licensed.

By reviewing this information, you can transition into your new business more smoothly. As each business situation is unique, you are encouraged to work directly with our Meat Inspection staff throughout the process for additional guidance on your plan. Please ask questions and work with your inspector as you navigate this process.

*Please note: **This document applies only for custom processors.** If you are interested in retail or wholesale operations, you will need to meet additional requirements. Let your inspector know when you start working with them if this is part of your plan.*

Getting Started

Building Permits, Zoning, and Local Codes

- Check with your local authorities (City/County) to determine what local permits may be needed.

These may include:

- Fire
- Electrical
- Occupancy
- Plumbing
- Local Zoning

Plan Review

- Review building plans with the area MDA Meat and Poultry Inspection Program supervisor and inspector. The plan review process is usually an informal process done through individual consultation and communication. Formal approval for custom exempt meat processing activities is not required.

Please note: Any facilities that will also operate as a retail establishment (produce meat for sale) must contact the MDA Food and Feed Safety Division to determine if an official retail plan review is needed for the retail portion of the facility.

Water Sources

- Establish a potable water source for your meat processing facility. This may be municipal water or a well.
 - If you have a municipal water supply, you will need a letter attesting to the potability of the water or a copy of the water testing report. This can be acquired from the municipality.
 - If you have a private well, you will need to test your water prior to operating to ensure it is free of coliform bacteria. After starting your operations, you will need to test your water twice a year for coliforms. Samples will need to be submitted to an accredited laboratory.

Septic System or Sewer Hook-Up

- Install and/or obtain approval for the septic system or sewer hook-up from your county, township, or local health department. You will need to provide a letter from the applicable authority to the MDA to verify that an adequate waste-water handling system is installed.

Plumbing System

- Contact the **Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry** (DLI) for current procedures and requirements by calling 651-284-5063.
 - Potable water must be used in all areas where animals are slaughtered, eviscerated, and dressed as well as any areas where edible products are processed, handled, and stored.
 - Both hot and cold water are required
 - Toilet rooms and urinals must be appropriately sized and conveniently located; they must be separate from rooms where products are stored or handled.
- The water distribution system must also:
 - » Carry sufficient water throughout the facility
 - » Carry sewage and liquid waste away from the facility
 - » Prevent adulteration of water, supplies, equipment, utensils, or creation of insanitary conditions
 - » Provide adequate floor drainage
 - » Prevent backflow conditions and cross connections between piping
 - » Prevent the buildup of sewer gases

*Please note: Your plumbing plan must be submitted by a licensed plumber to the **Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry** (DLI). Plan approval must be granted by DLI prior to installation. Working with your plumber is the best way to ensure your system meets these requirements.*

Sink Requirements

- Ensure you have separate sinks for handwashing and washing of equipment. Some flexibility in meeting these requirements is allowed. The following table provides additional information.

Type of Sink	Recommendations and Requirements
Three-compartment sink	Highly recommended for washing of equipment and utensils, but is not required for custom exempt only operators
Hand wash sink	Should be in the processing or slaughter room, at a minimum it must be conveniently located to the processing/slaughter area. A conveniently located sink is one that can be easily accessed without touching other surfaces.
Mop-service sink	Recommended for cleaning floors, but is not required for custom exempt only operators

Other Facility Requirements

- Ensure all surfaces are constructed of smooth, easily cleanable, non-porous, non-absorbent materials.
 - Walls and ceilings must be finished with materials that meet this standard. Examples include glass board, sealed concrete, metal, ceramic tile, etc. Exposed wood is NOT permissible.
 - Floors must be maintained in good repair and easily cleanable. Concrete is an acceptable option if it is sealed or non-porous.
- Provide adequate space for processing and slaughter activities.
 - Ideally, the processing and slaughter facilities should be divided into at least two rooms.
 - » The first room would be dedicated for killing and dressing. A hand wash sink must be conveniently located for food handlers working in this room.
 - » The second room would be dedicated for processing the carcasses and meat products that are manufactured. A hand wash sink must also be conveniently located for food handlers working in this room.
 - Ensure your facilities are large enough to accomplish the needed tasks. Important considerations are rail height, cooler sizes, and storage space.

Licensing and Permitting

- Have your facility inspected for licensing – this must be done **before** a license can be issued. Your designated meat inspector or area supervisor will help you complete the licensing application. The license fee will depend upon your gross annual sales. The lowest licensing category costs less than \$100.
- Obtain a custom processing permit. This permit is separate from the license and is also issued by your meat inspector. There is no fee for this permit.

Operating Your Meat Processing Business

Once you begin operations, your inspector will perform periodic inspections. These usually occur one to four times each year, depending upon your business size, scope, and operating season. During these inspections, the inspector will ensure you are meeting the sanitation and operating requirements. The following provides a list of specific areas they will examine.

Sanitation

Sanitation, including cleaning of equipment and facilities, is a very important part of producing safe food. As a meat processor you must ensure your facilities are clean while you operate so that the meat and poultry products do not become contaminated.

- ▶ Hot water is necessary to properly wash hands and clean equipment.
- ▶ Equipment needs to be cleaned daily after operations. Also, each day before you begin operations, check equipment to ensure it is clean.
- ▶ Cleaning of floors, walls, vents, and especially ceilings is important to ensure the environment does not contaminate your products.
- ▶ Sewage and waste removal systems must adequately remove sewage waste, and water – manure, feathers, ingesta, trash, garbage, and paper are all example of waste that must be properly removed.

Hand washing and Employee Hygiene

Hand washing is an important part of producing safe food. Remind employees to use soap when washing hands. All hand sinks must be stocked with soap and single-use towels. Clothing should be clean. Sick employees should stay home from work.

Handling Carcasses

As a custom exempt operator, you will likely be handling carcasses either through your own slaughter process or from meat products brought to the plant.

- ▶ All carcasses must be **visibly** free of fecal matter, dirt, ingesta, hair, milk, bile, or any other contamination.
- ▶ If you accept farm slaughter carcasses, all carcasses must be free of any visible contamination prior to storage or further processing. Contamination should be trimmed, rather than washed off carcasses.

Pest Control

- Your pest control program must be capable of preventing product adulteration from pests, such as rodents or flies. Preventing entry of these animals into your plant is critical to your operation. Openings (doors and windows) leading to outside or to inedible areas must close effectively and completely fill the opening. Areas inside and outside the establishment must also be maintained to prevent harborage of rodents and insects.

Inedible Material Control

Inedible materials are those by-products of slaughter and processing that cannot be used for human food. These products must be disposed of appropriately. Specifically:

- Containers supplied by a rendering company must be labeled as inedible and **may not** be relabeled and used as edible food handling containers.
- All inedible products must be denatured so that they cannot be used for human food.
- Inedibles must be disposed of using an approved method for the type of products you have. This may vary by species.

Marking and Labeling Control

Because custom exempt products may not be sold, product labeling is important to ensuring products are not inadvertently sold or combined or co-mingled with other products. Specific requirements include:

- ▶ All custom carcasses and packaged product must be marked "NOT FOR SALE".
- ▶ Livers, hearts, and tongues must also be legibly marked as "NOT FOR SALE" before they leave the kill floor. They must be returned to the owner of that animal or disposed of as inedible material.
- ▶ **All** custom processed meat must be returned **to the owner of the animal** or otherwise be denatured.

Records and General Operation

Meat processors must also keep records about their activities and customers. These records are part of general operational procedures used to ensure products are controlled and separate from those produced for sale and/or for individual customers. The following are required:

- ▶ Records, including the number of animals and species, and the owner's names and addresses for each animal. A pre-formatted logbook is available from the MDA if you need assistance with records.
- ▶ Providing adequate separation of retail (for sale) and custom product, if both are present.
- ▶ Smokehouse and cooking records that document cook times and temperatures. This ensures that the custom exempt products are cooked properly and are not adulterated.

For more information:

Contact us at MDA.MeatPoultryEgg@state.mn.us or call 651-201-6300.