

After the Hunt: Handling Meat from Animals Harvested on Hunting or Shooting Preserves

Preserves established for hunting large game animals are popular in Minnesota. Farmers who raise deer or elk often explore this as a potential outlet for the animals they raise. For the purposes of game farm, hunting, and wildlife laws, farmed Cervidae such as deer or elk are classified as livestock and not wild animals. This means the requirements for harvesting meat from these animals is not the same as for hunter-harvested wild animals.

This document provides guidance on Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) carcass and meat handling regulations for animals harvested on hunting or shooting preserves. These preserves must also follow all applicable regulations and game laws for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Minnesota Board of Animal Health (BAH) concerning the registration, animal identification, record keeping, fencing, CWD testing, etc. of farmed Cervidae.

General Requirements

Meat from animals harvested on a preserve can be used by the farmer or hunter for personal use only. This meat cannot be sold because it has not undergone the required inspection for disease and food safety. If the farmer or owner of the preserve wishes to provide a processing area and/or processing services, they must become a licensed and permitted custom exempt meat processing plant. Otherwise, the hunter must take the harvested game off-site or to their own home for any processing. The following summarizes what activities are and are not allowed based on whether the preserve is a licensed meat processing plant:

Preserve IS a licensed meat processing plant

- Hunter may process deer for his or her own use
- Processing may occur on-site, off-site at another licensed plant, or at the hunter's home
- Farmer may assist in processing at the plant

Preserve IS NOT a licensed meat processing plant

- Hunter may process deer for his or her own use
- Hunter may take deer off-site for further processing or to own home
- Farmer may not assist in processing

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Can a farmer sell a hunt to someone and allow the hunter to shoot the animal on the farm and harvest it for the hunter's personal use?

A farmer who raises animals for shooting purposes may sell a hunt and the animal to an individual. Then the hunter can shoot the animal and harvest it for personal use. The hunter is limited to only shooting and eviscerating the animal. Then, they may take it to a licensed and permitted custom exempt meat processing plant or directly home for their personal use.

Can a farmer assist in the slaughter and processing of that animal on their farm?

The farmer may not assist in the slaughter or processing (skinning, quartering, cutting, grinding, smoking, sausage making, etc.) of the animal unless they have an MDA license and permitted custom exempt processing facility on the farm.

Can farmers hunt an animal and then process it themselves?

A farmer may hunt their own animal and process it for their own personal use. However, the farmer may not hunt or process the animal for someone else.

The farmer wants to have meat available for purchase for hunters who are unsuccessful or who would rather take meat home that is already processed. What are the options?

Any meat sold on the farm must come from an animal that has been slaughtered under inspection at a Minnesota "Equal To" or USDA slaughter establishment. In this way, the meat from these animals can then be sold or given to the hunter.

What if the hunter does not want to keep the meat from the animal he or she hunted?

The meat can be discarded in compliance with BAH livestock carcass disposal regulations, or the hunter can give the meat to the farmer, friends, and family for their personal use. The hunter cannot sell the carcass, parts of the carcass, or any meat from that animal.

Can a hunter donate a carcass harvested at a hunting preserve through the Minnesota Venison Donation Program?

No, these carcasses cannot be donated through this program. Minnesota Statutes state that only wild deer harvested by hunters can be donated through the program.

Can a Cervidae farmer or hunter sell the carcass or part of the carcass they hunted to individuals, stores, restaurants, etc.?

No. Meat can only be sold if it has been inspected with "Equal To" or USDA inspection. Because this requires viewing of the live animal before the slaughter process and humane slaughter, it is very difficult to meet the requirements for this program in a hunting preserve situation.

For More Information

The applicable regulatory requirements are found in Minnesota Statutes 17, 17A, 31, 31A, 31B and 34A. For questions, contact the Minnesota Meat and Poultry Inspection Program at 651-201-6300 or email us at MDA.MeatPoultryEgg@State.mn.us.