

Selling Meat Locally - - 3 Ways **A Briefing Paper for Meat Farmers**

[**Note:** a licensed mobile *Poultry* processor unit is coming soon.]

Way # 1. Meat - Direct Sales.

A consumer makes an agreement with a farmer to buy a domestic animal (beef, sheep, hog). The farmer sells this animal *live*. He can sell this animal to a group of people who share it or he can sell it to a meat processing plant. It is up to the buyer(s) to decide where they want to take it for processing or if they want to process it themselves.

There are 2 types of processing facilities, both inspected, but at different levels of intensity. These processing facilities are Licensed by the Mt. Dept. of Livestock. Kill fees, hanging weights, cutting and wrapping costs are variable with each meat plant. The Dept. of Livestock also licenses the category of a Meat Depot.

1. Fully Inspected Slaughter/Processing Plant - continuous inspection on designated kill days.
2. Custom Exempt Processor - slaughter/processing plant - only for "Not for Sale" packaging, only processing meat for the owner of the animal. These plants are inspected less frequently than the above - normally x4/year, but when funds are low, x2/year.
3. Meat Depot - for the storage and distribution of inspected products. inspected x2/year.

The farmer cannot *say* they are selling "hanging weight" but the *price* can be determined based on hanging weight. When there are enough shares spoken for (i.e. ¼ or ½) to make a whole, the animal is taken to a fully inspected Meat Processor for butchering, or to a "Custom Exempt Plant" for butchering, such as N. Am. Foods in Hamilton. At either one, the *animal* in this case does not have to be inspected and the *carcass* stamped because the meat will be packaged with "**Not for Sale**" stamped on it. After being gutted, organs removed and skinned the two sides are weighed to give the "hanging weight". The farmer is paid his price/lb x hanging weight. The butcher is paid a kill fee plus so much a pound (hanging weight) for cutting and wrapping.

Way # 2. Sales to Retail Store - "Retail Exempt Processor"

Sales to Retail Store that has their own butcher. The Dept. of Livestock does not normally inspect a retail store, the county sanitarian does, so in this case the DoL designation; "Exempt" really means exempt. A retail store that handles the meat in any way is inspected and certified by the county sanitarian, using a State Dept. of Public Health & Human Services form.

The Store may purchase a *live* animal direct from the farmer as in Way #1, (rather than, say, from the "industrial meat grid") but the animal still must be *slaughtered* at a Fully Inspected and Licensed Processing facility. In this case, the processing facility will put its stamp on the *carcass*, on both halves, on the shoulder, rib and hind quarters. The store may then do the butchering and packaging and does not need any special type of label when selling at the store. This category can also include the arrangement where the Retail establishment does not have their own butcher but hires the processor to do the butchering for them.

A retail store butcher may also process meat for someone who owns an animal, be it the farmer or a customer who has bought a live animal. This will put the store in the category of a "Custom Exempt Processor" (as above) and thus will require inspection by the Dept. of Livestock as well as the normal county inspection. In this case, the meat must be labelled "Not for Sale".

Way #3. LABELED Meat - - this is the really tricky one.

A farmer cannot sell his meat himself. To sell say, at the Farmers' Market, he must convince a fully inspected processor to get a LABEL for the meat. There are several steps involved.

Step 1. Farmer must find a licensed, fully inspected Meat Processor who will agree to put his MARK (aka 'inspection legend') on the meat package LABEL. The mark will have the processor's number in it and the LABEL belongs to the processing plant. The *plant* will have to get it approved, and once approved, they have to keep it on their premises. The meat will have to be packaged and labeled by this processor. The LABEL may carry the farmer's name and logo on it, but it is the processing plants' label. If a plant were to accept this condition and let the farmer sell the labeled meat, the farmer would only be transporting and selling this product "as is".

This means that the *Processor* has decided to trust that the *Farmer* will handle the meat appropriately because, if there arises a problem with the meat, i.e. spoilage, contamination or whatever, the *Processor* could be liable. It may take considerable effort, persistence and time for a *Farmer* to win the confidence of a *Processor*. Also, a *Processor* may have all the business he can handle and may reject the *Farmer* on that basis.

Step 2. Processor must get the LABEL approved. First the farmer and the processor need to decide what product they wish to sell: hamburger?, ribs?, steaks? roasts?, sausage? – each has a different label with different requirements, i.e. fat content for hamburger. Multi-ingredient products have extensive regulations and restriction requirements.

Next, they must submit their proposed label(s) to the local **Inspector**. The only Inspector for Ravalli County is David Sylvester (829-6013 cell). The inspectors for Missoula county are David Sylvester and Karen Darnell. Once the inspector approves the proposed label, he will submit it to the State Dept. of Livestock, Meat Inspection Bureau (444-5202). It will go to Kris Clawson, their label specialist. The approval (or rejection) will be sent back to Dave. This process is likely to take 2 months, maybe more, depending on what kind of product is envisioned and its requirements and how much dickering happens. There is no fee for getting a label approved. Of course, then the farmer must find a printer to print the labels, for a fee.

Step 3. to sell at Farmers' Market: Farmer must obtain a "Food Purveyor" aka "Mobile Meat Vendor" license from the county sanitarian who will need to see the above approval forms. This is actually a Mt. Dept. of Public Health & Human Services License that the Co. Sanitarian fills out after inspecting the farmer's mobile equipment (freezer or refrig unit), but each county may have a different system for this step. Most vendors at Fmrs' Mkts choose to apply for "frozen" meat, as the equipment for "fresh" meat is more expensive. For frozen meat, the vendor may simply have a freezer at the market, or may even use a commercial grade cooler with dry ice. (This according to the Missoula Co. Sanitarian, Nate Langacher 258-4755). He said this license is good for the whole state. Missoula Co has an extensive written Plan application that must be submitted before the inspection by the sanitarian, with a \$210 fee. Ravalli Co. does not have this extensive pre-inspection form. The Ravalli Co. fee is \$60 and the Ravalli Co. Sanitarian for this is John Palacio, 375-6568.

"Meat Depot" License

If the farmer wants to store this meat at home, he would have to get a "Meat Depot" License from the Dept. of Livestock. His storage facility, i.e. freezer, would then be inspected twice a year.

NOTE #1: regarding planning your time to accomplish all of these tasks, be sure to account for people not returning your calls - - especially the offices in Helena. Almost always, you have to leave a message and then sometimes wait days for a return call, if at all.

Processor Contact Info: There are only two fully inspected *Processors* in both Missoula and Ravalli Counties: Hamilton Packing (Marty: 961-3861) and Lolo Locker (Ted: 273-3876). Hamilton Packing currently only works in Way #3 with Lifeline Farm. Lolo Locker has more such clients working via Way #3. Hamilton Pack has 2 kill days: Tues & Friday. Lolo's kill day is Thurs. On these days the Inspector is present at these facilities.

NOTE #2: Brand Inspections

Every cow that is involved in a change of ownership or is to be slaughtered must have a brand inspection. This can happen at the ranch or at the slaughter facility before the kill. The farmer must call the brand inspector and make arrangements. Fees are .50/head for the brand inspection and a mandatory \$1.00/head which goes to the beef council, and the inspector can/may also charge mileage.

The Bitterroot Brand Inspectors are:

Jack & Helen Eden - - Hamilton - - 363-6252

Ron Holten - - up Skalkaho - - 363-4142

Jodi Hood - - Victor - - 642-3678

Marilyn Stromberg - - Stevi - - 777-2331

Replacement needed - - Darby - - ????

The regional Brand Inspection office is: Boone Jones - - Missoula - - 243-5689

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