EXEMPTION ALLOWS SMALL-SCALE RABBIT PRODUCERS TO SELL MEAT AT FARMERS’ MARKETS

Charleston, W.Va. – West Virginians who raise rabbits on a small scale may now sell the meat at farmers’ markets and through consignment shops after registering with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA). A Legislative code change this year exempted a limited number of rabbits from inspection and slaughter at premises where they are raised.

The rule covers those who raise and slaughter up to 1,000 rabbits in a calendar year. The premises must be registered with the WVDA, which is free of charge, but does not have to undergo inspections. The producers must follow WVDA-approved guidelines:

- No person with a contagious disease can process rabbits.
- Only healthy rabbits are eligible for processing/sale.
- Rabbits must be slaughtered in a humane method.
- Rabbits must be slaughtered and dressed in a sanitary manner. Cooling of rabbits must start immediately after slaughter and rabbits must be chilled to less than 40 degrees within 24 hours.
- Rabbits may be sold fresh but must be frozen if not sold within 72 hours
- Equipment used in the processing of rabbits must be cleaned and sanitized as necessary.
- Rabbits and rabbit parts must have the processor’s name and address, product name, net weight, safe handling instructions, and slaughter date on each package label.
- Sale and production records must be provided to a WV Department of Agriculture compliance officer/inspector if and when requested.
- Producers must keep records for a minimum of two years.

Previously, rabbit meat could only be sold if it was processed in a licensed facility. The change in the rules is expected to be a boost for small farmers who may produce up to 25,000 pounds of rabbit meat annually. The new rule also allows the WVDA to monitor the slaughter/sale of rabbits and to what markets. The rabbit producers still have fewer requirements than those raising animals such as cattle, chickens, and pigs.

You can find the application for Registration to Slaughter and/or Process Rabbits Under Exemption on our website at www.agriculture.wv.gov.

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