

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

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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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