

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

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RABBIT EXEMPTION REQUIREMENTS

1. Up to 20,000 rabbits per calendar year may be slaughtered and processed at the premises where they were raised. The resulting rabbit meat products may be sold without inspection within West Virginia. These sales include, but are not limited to, direct sales to individuals, at farmer's markets, restaurants, grocery stores, and wholesales/distributors.
2. Premises where rabbits are raised and procedures used for slaughtering and processing the rabbits must be registered annually with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA).
3. No person with a contagious disease can process rabbits.
4. Only healthy rabbits are eligible for processing/sale.
5. Rabbits must be slaughtered using a humane method.
6. Rabbits must be slaughtered and dressed in a sanitary manner.
7. Cooling of rabbits must start immediately after slaughter and rabbits must be chilled to less than 40 degrees within 24 hours.
8. Rabbits may be sold fresh but must be frozen if not sold within 72 hours of slaughter.
9. Equipment used in the slaughter and processing of rabbits must be cleaned and sanitized as necessary but at least daily at the end of use.
10. Rabbit meat products must have a label on each package. The label must include the following information:
 - Processor's name and address
 - Product Name
 - Net Weight
 - Safe handling instructions (Make sure the instructions do not indicate that the product was prepared from inspected and passed meat.)
 - Slaughter Date
11. Please do not include any claims on the package labeling. (You may communicate information about raising practices, breeds, nutritional benefits, etc. on signage at the point-of-purchase or via social media.)
12. Sales and production records must be provided to a WVDA compliance officer/inspector if and when requested. The premises where the exempted rabbit slaughter occurs may be visited by WVDA staff without prior notice.
13. Producers must keep records for a minimum of two years.

Example Rabbit Slaughter Protocol

Stunning: Swift and humane cervical dislocation using appropriate equipment.

Hanging: Using specialized pieces of equipment, rabbits are hung by the feet, as opposed to the gambrels, thereby limiting contact with contaminants from the hanging apparatus.

Bleeding: Jugulars are cut and the head is removed. Blood and inedibles are collected in a vessel under the hanging setup.

Skinning: Legs are skinned first, and the rest of the pelt is worked downward. Hides are stored separately for later scraping and salting.

Evisceration: Entrails are removed intact, through careful incision, avoiding contamination. Offal is separated, rinsed, and then cooled in an ice bath dedicated to offal, until it is below 40 degrees F. Vacuum pack and freeze offal immediately.

Rinse: Carcass is rinsed thoroughly with clean water.

Chilling: The cleaned carcass is placed in an ice bath until temperature is less than 40 degrees F.

Packaging: Vacuum pack, weigh, and label with farm name and address, product name, net weight, safe handling instructions, slaughter date, and price.

Aging: Refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours, maintaining temperature below 40 degrees F.

Freezer: Store in chest freezer (-15F to 10F) for a minimum of 3 days prior to transport.

Transport: Transport frozen to market in coolers with ice. Sold frozen.

Only healthy rabbits are eligible for processing and sale. Rabbits will be slaughtered using a humane method. No person with a contagious disease will be involved in any process or handling of the rabbits, the meat, or processing equipment. Slaughter, skinning and butchering, will all be conducted in a sanitary manner. After stunning, the rabbit is hung by the hind legs above the neck joint. The head is immediately removed to allow complete bleeding and the forefeet are removed. The skin around the hock joints of the legs is cut followed by an incision along the legs to the rump area. Remove the tail and pull the skin down and forward over the body. The skins of young or fryer age rabbits are easily removed in this way; it is more difficult to remove the skins of older rabbits. All processing equipment will be cleaned and sanitized as necessary and always at the end of use for the day. Immediately after processing is complete, the meat will be chilled to less than 40 degrees F within 24 hours. All meat will be sold fresh within 48 hours of being processed. All meat will be frozen within 72 hours after being slaughtered/processed. The rabbit meat and rabbit parts for sale will have all the necessary information attached by label(s). The label(s) will contain establishment name and address, the product name, the net weight, safe handling instructions, and the date of slaughter on each package sold. Establishment will keep all records of rabbit production and sales for a minimum of two years and provide the documents to a WV Department of Agriculture compliance officer/inspector in a timely manner if and when requested.