

Ontario Meat Basics

Read on if you aren't very familiar with meat processing & industry regulation in Ontario - it may help you take more away from the webinar.

Where does slaughter happen in Ontario?

- Animals grown on Ontario farms must be slaughtered and processed in either federally or provincially-inspected plants – the only exception being meat that is produced for the farming family's own consumption. Meat that will be sold *only* within the province can be processed at a provincial plant; if the meat will cross provincial borders it must be processed at a federal plant.
- So, a farmer who wants to directly market his/her meat to consumers – either at a farmers market, a farm store/butcher shop, or through restaurants – must take their animals to a provincial slaughterhouse.
- Also, that particular slaughterhouse would need to offer “custom” services (which means that they do the killing, cutting, wrapping and, if desired, the smoking / curing of the animal according to the farmers' specifications). Not all provincially-regulated slaughterhouses offer “custom” services, but many do. Federal plants do not – they cannot return particular animals to those who raised them and instead, the meat is distributed nation-wide & sold through grocery stores, to restaurants, etc.

Who Regulates Who?

- OMAFRA (the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) is the government agency charged with managing the inspection of all provincial plants. In 1991 regulations were made specifying that all meat grown for provincial consumption must be processed at inspected plants. As of September 2012, OMAFRA inspects **34 poultry and 129 red meat plants** in Ontario.ⁱ
- The CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) is responsible for the inspection of all federal plants. As of 2004, there were 33 federally-regulated meat plants in Ontario, processing 85% of meat processed in the province.ⁱⁱ
- “Free-Standing Meat Plants” (FSMP) are now regulated by OMAFRA also, provided they do “category 2” activities - canning, curing, dehydrating or smoking or any other “medium-to-high risk” activities. In comparison, processing plants that do cutting & wrapping or sausage or meat pie making are considered “category 1” and so, as long as they only sell directly to consumers, these plants are only subject to oversight from municipal public health authorities.

How have regulations changed recently?

- The most significant change to food safety regulations was the *Food Safety and Quality Act (FSQA)* which entered into effect on December 5, 2001. This act was intended to “modernize” the food system by combining the regulations contained in the seven or so statutes that had previously governed food safety. It involved a stream-lining intended to make it easier to incorporate national food safety standards into provincial ones.
- An interesting piece of food safety legislation these days is HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), a system that tries to “detect potential hazards” before they happen and is designed to complement inspection and testing. Its proponents assert that it is “systematic and preventative”ⁱⁱⁱ while critics argue that it creates barriers for small operators without actually enhancing food safety. Abiding by this system is currently *voluntary* (but strongly encouraged) for provincially-regulated meat plants, but since 2005 federally-regulated plants have been *required* to abide by these rules.

What's the situation now? Are there enough abattoirs & processors?

- Overall, the number of provincial abattoirs operating in Ontario has decreased by 40% since 1991.^{iv} Not surprisingly, between 2004 and 2011 the number of cattle slaughtered each year

at provincial plants went down from 189,806 to 95,346.^v So, given that demand for local meat seems to be on the rise, there does seem to be a growing & worrisome gap in processing infrastructure.

- Availability of services varies greatly by region. For example, one third of abattoirs in Eastern Ontario have closed over the past seven years and about half of those are likely to close over the next five years, as they have older owners who may not be interested in investing in upgrading their infrastructure since they would have only a limited time to recoup the investment.^{vi}
- More research is needed to determine exactly which areas are experiencing a lack of abattoirs, and what exactly is causing these abattoirs to close.

Mobile Abattoirs... what are they??

- Basically, they are transport trailers that have been retro-fitted so that they can operate as fully-equipped slaughterhouses – on wheels! They come in different sizes and are designed in many different ways (i.e. sometimes on a 53 ft. trailer, sometimes a shorter one; sometimes 2 trailers are used so that one can transport chilled carcasses to a “cut and wrap” facility while slaughter continues in the other one.)
- They operate in various parts of the US, as well as in BC and Alberta. One of the first successful examples operates in San Juan County, Washington State, an island quite close to Victoria, BC. (More information is available at <http://www.mobileslaughter.com> & <http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/stories/mobile-meat-processing-unit-lopez-community-land-trust/>). This mobile unit was set up in a unique environment – an island in the Pacific Ocean – and had the help of a Community Land Trust in establishing the program.
- It’s important for us to consider if this type of abattoir would work well in parts of Ontario...

ⁱ http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/meatinsp/licenced_operators_list.htm

ⁱⁱ <http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/about/pubs/meatinspectionreport/chapter13.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/about-the-cfia/newsroom/food-safety-system/haccp/eng/1346306502207/1346306685922>

^{iv} http://www.cielap.org/pdf/CIELAP_FoodLegalBarriers.pdf

^v <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/stats/livestock/index.html>

^{vi} Eastern Ontario Mobile Abattoir Feasibility Study by WCM Consulting, 2005.