

# Livestock Slaughter and Meat Processing Requirements in California

## Background

The growth in popularity of locally-produced foods and pasture-raised meats has greatly increased direct marketing opportunities for livestock producers. While selling meats locally and directly to the consumer appeals to some producers, these sales come with the burden of understanding regulatory requirements for livestock slaughter and meat processing, normally dealt with by large companies under traditional commodity sales.

The three scenarios for slaughter and processing of cattle, swine, sheep, and goats, depending on ownership and sales status, are outlined in Figure 1.

**Scenario #1 *Meat for Personal Consumption.*** Livestock producers may slaughter their own animals or contract with mobile custom slaughterers for on-farm slaughter of animals to be consumed within their household as described above. Meat from animals slaughtered on-farm cannot be sold.

**Scenario #2 *Live Animal Sales.*** Live animals may be sold then transported to either a USDA or a CDFA slaughterhouse for slaughter, and a USDA or Custom Exempt processing facility for post-slaughter processing. This meat is intended for consumption in the owner's (the person who purchased the animal) household and must be consumed by the owner or members of the owner's household, which can include the owner's non-paying guests and employees.

**Scenario #3 *Meat Sales.*** All meat sold in California must be slaughtered at a USDA-inspected slaughter facility and, in most cases, processed<sup>1</sup> at a USDA-inspected processing plant. The only cases in which USDA-slaughtered meat can be processed at other than USDA facilities, and sold are:

1. USDA-slaughtered animals are processed at a County Environmental Health Services (EHS)-inspected retail facility, such as a restaurant, grocery store meat department, or specialty meat market, and sold retail on-site.
2. USDA-slaughtered animals are smoked, dried, cured, or rendered at a California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)-inspected facility and sold retail on-site.

Following legal slaughter and processing requirements is essential to sustaining your operation. Violations can carry fines and penalties and may lead to shut-down of non-compliant operations.

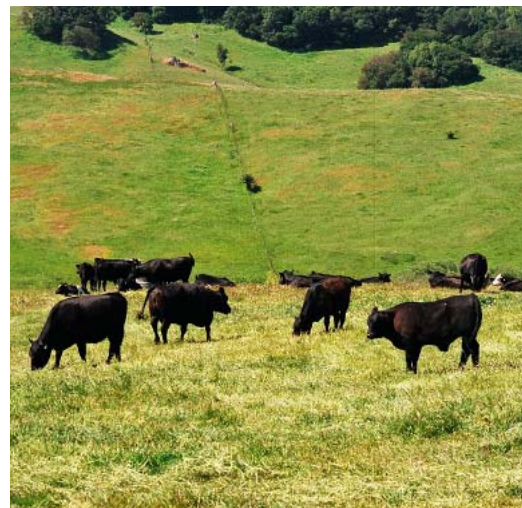
## Other Resources

1. California Department of Food and Agriculture, Animal Health and Food Safety Services, Meat and Poultry Inspection Branch. This state office website has information about various aspects of meat production and links to associated organizations. [http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/AHFSS/Meat\\_and\\_Poultry\\_Inspection/MPI\\_Home.html](http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/AHFSS/Meat_and_Poultry_Inspection/MPI_Home.html)
2. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service website has links to regulations regarding slaughter and processing and is useful for searching related topics. <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>

<sup>1</sup> Processing is used here to mean any post-slaughter butchering; the term "processing" is sometimes used to mean both slaughter and post-slaughter butchering.

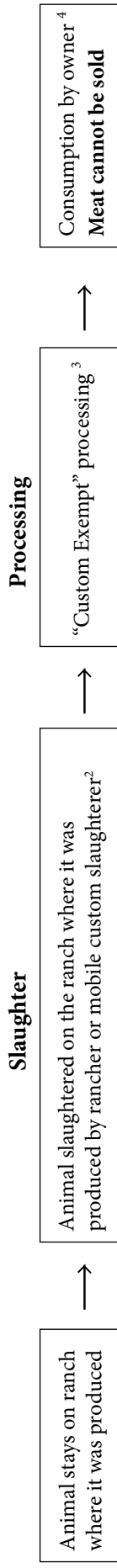
*Prepared by Lisa Bush and Ellie Rilla, July 2008.*

*More information about diversifying your operation is available at the Grown in Marin website under Resources for Farmers at <http://www.growninmarin.org>, or by calling the UCCE Farm Advisor's office at 415/499-4204.*



**Figure 1. Minimum slaughter and processing requirements for legal production, processing, and sales of meat**

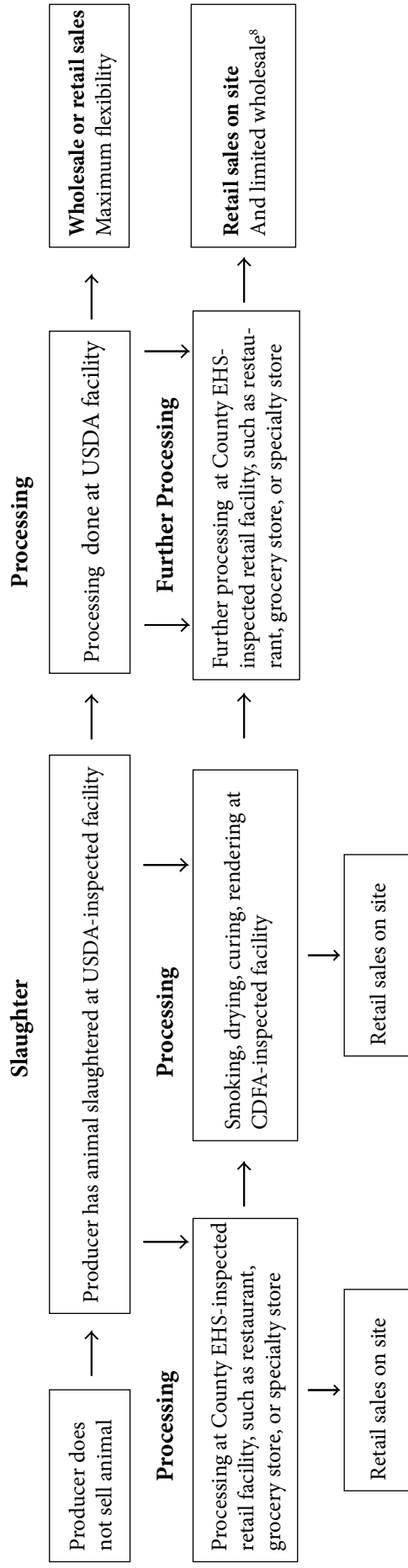
**Scenario #1 Meat for Personal Consumption** (neither animal nor meat is sold)



**Scenario #2 Live Animal Sales** (animal sold then slaughtered and processed – meat cannot be sold)



**Scenario #3 Meat Sales**



<sup>2</sup> Mobile custom slaughterers, also called “farmer’s helpers” or “A-framers” must be registered with the state brand inspector but do not perform animal inspection.  
<sup>3</sup> Bud’s, Ibleto, Martindale’s, Willowside are also CDEA-inspected for the smoking, drying, curing, and rendering aspects of their operations.  
<sup>4</sup> Owner includes members of the owner’s household and the owner’s non-paying guests and employees. Intended for consumption in the owner’s household.  
<sup>5</sup> Owner means the customer(s) who purchased the animal from the producer – can be one or more people.  
<sup>6</sup> Unless slaughtered in mobile USDA slaughter facility or possibly mobile CDEA-inspected slaughter facility (neither of these yet exist in California).  
<sup>7</sup> Unless done in mobile slaughter facility (see footnote 2). There is not a CDEA-inspected slaughter facility in Marin or Sonoma Counties.  
<sup>8</sup> At least 75% or more sold retail on site where processing occurred or other location under same ownership in “normal retail quantities.” Up to 25% can be sold wholesale to hotels, restaurants and institutions (referred to as HRI – does not include grocery stores).