

The legal side of on-farm food-animal processing in Ohio and what you need to know about specified risk materials

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Background

Animal processing on-farm is a practice of harvesting (slaughtering) one's own food animals to provide for one's own family. Even though not a common practice, this home process still exists. This fact sheet serves to assist in answering basic questions.

What are the types of inspection in the United States and what do they mean?

In the United States, meat products intended for commercial sale must be inspected. A brief explanation of the types of inspection requirements include federal, state, custom exempt, and personal/individual-use exemption.

- **Federal inspection:** Establishments intended to sell meat products throughout the United States and other countries (intercommerce) will need to obtain federal inspection status. The agency responsible is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), specifically the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS), which provides inspectors during hours of operation.
- **State inspection:** Establishments producing meat products to be sold within state lines (intracommerce) require inspection provided by the state. The agency overseeing state inspection is the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), regulated under a state Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) program. However, state-inspected establishments can sell meat products across state lines under the Cooperative Interstate Shipment (CIS) agreement. It involves state-inspection personnel but is overseen by USDA-FSIS.

**State inspection shall be "equal to" federal inspection in accordance to the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967 (also called "Equal To" law).*

- **Custom exemption:** Establishments deemed as custom exempt slaughter and process food animals belonging to someone else for a fee without inspection. The establishment provides a service solely for the owner and his/her family. Custom-exempt meat products shall not be sold or resold. Selling uninspected meat, as is the practice in animal processing on-farm, is considered a crime in Ohio.
- **Personal/individual-use exemption:** Under certain conditions, a person may harvest/slaughter his/her own livestock exclusively for his/her family and nonpaying guests. Meat products cannot be sold. Selling uninspected meat, as is the practice in animal processing on-farm, is considered a crime in Ohio.



Personal/individual-use exemption (cont'd.)

In the state of Ohio, the government (ODA) allows the splitting of an animal up to four ways per four different families. The slaughtering process shall take place on property belonging to one of the families that will be receiving the meat only for personal consumption. A person can also use a mobile operation that comes to their property to process their food animals.

Can anyone perform this task?

Someone who is very experienced, skilled in this line of work, and fully understands the importance of animal welfare, humane stunning, good manufacturing practices, sanitary dressing procedures, and processing is ideal.

What's at stake?

Even though good intentions are at the forefront of this type of practice, without the use of an ideal setup, including an inspector and proper tools and equipment of a meat processor, food safety may be at risk. Outdoor processing allows for an acceptable environment, but a risk of cross contamination due to improper dressing procedures and inadequate sanitation can, and will, pose a risk resulting in illness or even death. For a more in-depth discussion of food safety, review the fact sheet *What you need to know about animal processing on the farm in Ohio*, provided by Ohio State University Extension:

meatsci.osu.edu/sites/meatsci/files/imce/What%20You%20Need%20to%20Know%20About%20Food%20Animal%20Processing%20in%20Ohio%20FINAL.pdf.

Additional information to consider

On December 23, 2003, the United States experienced its first case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), commonly known as mad cow disease. Since the first case, USDA-FSIS provided additional safeguards designed to protect consumers against BSE in beef products. An action step set forth included the removal of specified risk materials (SRMs).

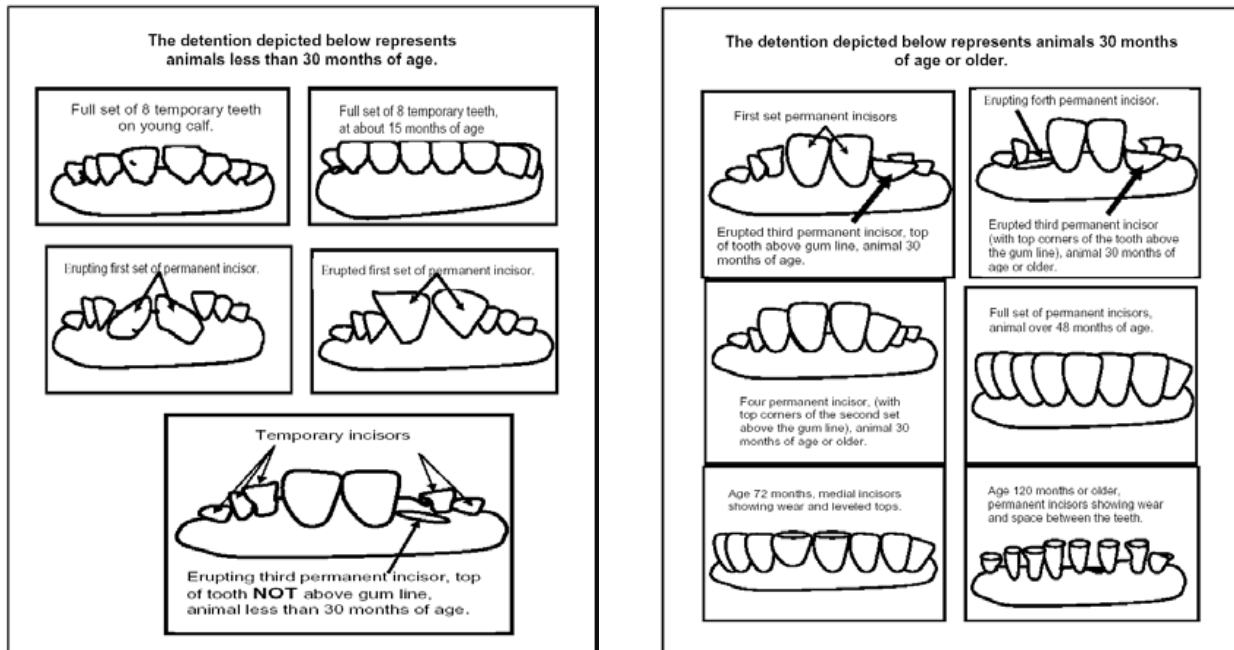
What are Specified Risk Materials (SRMs)?

SRMs are certain tissues in cattle considered to be of high risk for prion contamination. Extensive research studies have shown that BSE is more prevalent in tissues of cattle that are 30 months and older. If birth records are not available to determine age, dentition should be used; unfortunately, it provides only a general determination of age.

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Dentition

Dentition is considered a precise method in determining the age of cattle at the time of slaughter. FSIS considers cattle exhibiting the eruption of the third incisor (adult tooth), that has broken the gum line as less than 30 months of age. When this occurs, the removal of SRMs is necessary to avoid any possible transmission of BSE to humans. Below are examples of various scenarios relating to dentition.



Images from Beef Research, National Cattleman's Association, 2004:

[beefresearch.org/CMDocs/BeefResearch/Safety Project Summaries/FY03 Use of dentition and skeletal maturity.pdf](http://beefresearch.org/CMDocs/BeefResearch/Safety%20Project%20Summaries/FY03%20Use%20of%20dentition%20and%20skeletal%20maturity.pdf).

For further details about evaluating dentition to age cattle via FSIS, consult the following:

- fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/4716e62b-74be-49c2-aa53-20123d2ff398/IM_SRM_control.pdf?MOD=AJPERES
- fsis.usda.gov/OFO/TSC/bse_information.htm
- fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/frame-redirect?url=https://www.fsis.usda.gov/OFO/TSC/bse_information.htm

SRMs and what needs to be removed

All ages of cattle, including veal:

- Tonsils
- Distal ileum (last 80 inches of small intestine, uncoiled)
- Brain
- Spinal cord

SRMs and what needs to be removed (cont'd)

Cattle less than 30 months of age, showing third incisor (adult tooth) breaking gum line:

- Skull
- Brain
- Trigeminal ganglia (nerves attached to brain)
- Eyes
- Spinal cord
- Vertebral column (backbone)—excluding tail and transverse process of thoracic (rib) and lumbar (loin) vertebrae and wings of sacrum (hip bone)

How does being less than 30 months of age impact beef cuts in beef carcasses?

Cattle deemed ≥ 30 months of age at time of slaughter will not provide bone-in products; rather, they will provide only boneless beef cuts. In other words, bone-in ribeyes, bone-in strip steaks, porterhouse, and T-bone steaks, and other common bone-in meat cuts will not be available.

Recommendations for assistance with questions

Contacts:

- Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA)
- Meat Extension Specialists, Ohio State University
- Your County Health Department
- Your local county OSU Extension office

Disclaimer: This information is intended to inform those thinking about or involved in processing animals on the farm. The information provided is intended to present the importance of food safety and risks that come with it. It is not intended to explain the process of dressing procedures, nor is it intended to promote this type of scenario. Meat processing is complicated, and it should not be taken lightly. Person(s) involved should understand that carelessness is not an option with food safety.