

LIVESTOCK “SHARE”



DEFINITIONS

Livestock: Live cattle, pigs, sheep, or goats

Meat : Muscle and other edible parts from a slaughtered animal

Livestock “share”: A portion of ownership of a livestock animal — mostly commonly a whole, half, quarter, or eighth “share” of an animal

EFO: Emergency Food Organization (ex. food banks, food pantries, meal programs, etc.)

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture

FSIS: Food Safety Inspection Services, a regulatory branch of USDA responsible for inspecting meat

WSDA: Washington State Department of Agriculture

**Food Safety and
Consumer Services Division
Food Assistance**

foodassistance@agr.wa.gov
agr.wa.gov/services/food-access

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Please call the WSDA Receptionist at 360-902-1976 or TTY 800-833-6388.

LIVESTOCK “SHARE” Purchase and Donation Guide

This guide is for food banks and Emergency Food Organizations (EFOs) helping clients access locally-raised livestock or livestock “shares,” which may be processed at a Custom Meat Facility if all conditions of the Custom Exemption are met.

Requirements for Meat

Meat received by food banks and EFOs must come from livestock harvested (slaughtered) under USDA-FSIS inspection. This meat must also be processed (made into primal cuts, individual cuts, ground meat, sausage, etc.) at a USDA-FSIS-inspected or a Retail-Exempt facility. See the Meat Donations Guide (AGR 558) for additional information.

Custom Exemption for Livestock and Livestock Shares

Under the Custom Exemption to the Federal Meat Inspection Act (9 CFR 303.1), livestock may be harvested and processed on behalf of an individual consumer or household that owns the livestock (or a partial “share” of the livestock) at a Custom Meat Facility that is licensed by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). The individual or household must own the livestock (or partial share of the livestock) before the animal is slaughtered. The meat may be consumed only by the livestock or share owner and their household. The meat may not be sold or distributed outside the owner’s household.

The Custom Exempt model is widely used by farmers selling to individuals and households wishing to purchase livestock for meat. It has also been used by ranchers to compensate employees with livestock “shares.” The Custom Exempt model may also be a way for food bank clients to access locally-raised or culturally-relevant meat, if they can become full or partial owners of livestock prior to harvest.



Washington
State Department of
Agriculture

**FOOD
ASSISTANCE**



Information in this fact sheet is our best understanding of the laws and regulations at the time of publication. If there is a conflict between what is written and what is contained in law, the applicable law prevails. Laws and regulations are subject to change. Please refer to the contacts listed for the most up-to-date information.

LIVESTOCK may be harvested and processed on behalf of individual food bank clients at a WSDA-licensed Custom Meat Facility, if **ALL** the following conditions are met:

1. Records show a unique food bank client becoming the new owner (or partial owner) of the livestock BEFORE the animal was harvested; **AND**
2. Records show the food bank client becoming the owner of a unique animal, identified BEFORE harvest; **AND**
3. The unique food bank client receives meat **ONLY** from the unique animal they own (or partially own), and from **NO** other animal(s).

Frequently Asked Questions

- ***Can the food bank pay for the livestock or processing?*** Yes, the food bank may pay the farmer and/or butcher on behalf of the food bank client. However, records must show transfer of ownership from the farmer to the unique food bank client occurring **PRIOR** to the animal's harvest.
- ***How many "shares" are allowed per animal — in other words, how many food bank clients can be the owners of one animal?*** It is recommended to divide livestock ownership into no more than 8 shares. More shares per animal can increase the risk of non-compliance with food safety and traceability requirements of the Custom Exemption.
- ***Can the food bank client receive ground meat?*** Yes, the food bank client may receive some or all of their livestock share as ground meat. However, the ground meat may be derived **ONLY** from the animal they own or partially own, and from no other animal.
- ***How long should the food bank retain records?*** The food bank, farmer, slaughterer, and butcher must maintain and make records available upon request to USDA-FSIS for at least one year. Funding sources may require longer records retention.

Record-keeping

The EFO should collect the following information regarding each food bank client and livestock share.

- Contact information for farmer and each client (the new livestock/share owner), including names, addresses, and contact information.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WSDA Greenbook Factsheet 27: Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, Goat and Other Meat

Available online at agr.wa.gov/farmfoodbiz (under key resources and publications)

Food Assistance Donation Guides for:

- ***Eggs in the Shell***
- ***Exotic Meat***
- ***Fresh Fish***
- ***Meat***
- ***Poultry***
- ***Wild Game***

Available online at agr.wa.gov/services/food-access/hunger-relief-resources/donations

- Description of the unique livestock changing ownership, such as: species, breed, color, sex, approximate weight, age, ear tag number, or other identifying marks.
- Share size — most commonly a whole, half, quarter, or eighth of an animal.
- Estimated harvest (slaughter) date.
- List of activities the farmer and/or EFO may do on behalf of the new livestock owner (food bank client), such as: housing and care of livestock until the estimated date of harvest; scheduling and coordinating with a WSDA-licensed slaughterer and butcher; paying for the livestock and butchering fees; coordinating meat delivery to clients.
- Date and signatures acknowledging change of ownership of the livestock (or share of the livestock).

Role of the EFO

EFOs can play a supportive role by:

- Documenting change of livestock ownership from the farmer to individual client(s). See the “Record-keeping” section, above.
- Paying for the livestock, livestock share, and/or processing fees on behalf of the client (new owner), if allowed by the funding source. See “Funding source” section, below.
- Delivering processed meat directly to food bank clients (who are the livestock owners). Note: the food bank may want to document compliance with food safety regulations, such as keeping an inspection log for delivery vehicles and coolers, as well as documenting that temperatures are kept below 40°F during transport. Food bank clients may also pick up their meat directly from the butcher. The food bank may NOT store the meat for clients.

Example Steps

1. The EFO and farmer discuss availability of livestock shares. The EFO promotes the offering and allows all interested clients an opportunity to sign up with names and contact info.
2. An agreement is signed between the farmer and each food bank client, showing a unique food bank client becoming the owner of a unique livestock (or livestock share), BEFORE harvest. This document may also give permission for the EFO or farmer to perform certain activities on behalf of the food bank client (livestock owner) -- such as coordinating or



QUESTIONS?

For all general questions about the Custom Exemption and livestock shares, please contact:

WSDA Regional Markets
agr.wa.gov/farmfoodbiz
smallfarms@agr.wa.gov

For questions about allowable use EFO funding, please contact:

WSDA Food Assistance
agr.wa.gov/services/food-access
foodassistance@agr.wa.gov

For specific questions about food safety, please contact your local health department, or:

WSDA Food Safety
agr.wa.gov/departments/food-safety/food-safety
foodsafety@agr.wa.gov

paying for harvest and processing, or offering delivery. See “Record-keeping” section above.

3. The farmer schedules and coordinates with a WSDA-licensed slaughterer and WSDA-licensed Custom Meat Facility. Copies of livestock ownership documentation are shared with the slaughterer and butcher.
4. The farmer or EFO communicates with the WSDA-licensed butcher about cut-and-wrap specifications, including making sure meat is labeled and kept separate for each individual food bank client (livestock owner).
5. The EFO pays the farmer for the livestock on behalf of the food bank clients (new livestock owners). Cost is typically based on the carcass hanging weight, unless the livestock is donated.
6. The EFO verifies licenses and pays the slaughterer and butcher on behalf of the food bank client(s). Processing fees are typically charged per pound.
7. The EFO tells clients when their meat is ready for pickup at the butcher, or the food bank may pick up and deliver to clients directly. EFOs may NOT store meat for individual clients.
8. The EFO, farmer, slaughterer, and butcher maintain records for at least one year, unless otherwise required by funding source. Food Assistance programs often require record retention for six (6) years.

EFO Funding Source

EFOs have used unrestricted donor funds to pay the farmer, slaughterer, and butcher on behalf of the food bank client (new livestock owner). If using public funds to purchase livestock shares on behalf of individual clients, it is important to ensure all clients have equal access to the opportunity.

Many sources of government funding **do not allow** for purchasing livestock or paying butcher fees. For example, the Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA) pilot program (2022 – 2025) explicitly disallows purchasing live animals (livestock). Currently, most WSDA Food Assistance programs do not allow for purchasing live animals.

However, it is possible that WSDA-EFAP (Emergency Food Assistance Program) funds could be used for butcher fees. WSDA’s Farm to Food Pantry and Resiliency Grants initiatives may allow grant recipients to cover livestock purchases and/or butchering costs. Contact each program directly for additional details about allowable use of funds, or reach out to WSDA Food Assistance: foodassistance@agr.wa.gov.