

Meat Regulation Amendment Proposal

Summary of Proposal

The meat processing industry provides a vital link between livestock farmers in rural Ontario and consumers. It is a major contributor to Ontario's economy and a significant industry that creates jobs.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) licenses and inspects meat plants under *The Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001* (FSQA) and the Meat Regulation (O. Reg. 31/05) which provide standards for the humane slaughter of food animals and the safe processing of meat products. Meat plants are either slaughter plants (perform slaughter and possibly meat processing) or freestanding plants (perform only meat processing). Provincially licensed meat plants are permitted to sell and distribute their products only within the province of Ontario.

Through previous stakeholder engagement, feedback was received to help modernize the regulation to reduce unnecessary burden and be more outcome-focused and evidence-based, while continuing to protect the public interest. In addition, some other regulatory requirements were found that could be updated to clarify existing language and address other burden in the regulation while maintaining food safety.

Specifically, the ministry is proposing changes to O. Reg. 31/05 Meat which would:

1. Reduce administrative burden;
2. Clarify requirements to provide more business opportunities; and
3. Move to more outcome-based requirements.

Summary of Proposed Regulatory Amendments

1. Reducing Administrative Burden

One-Time Licensing

As part of the initial licence application, a meat plant provides information on the facility, the processes that will be performed, the water system that will be used for processing and the hours of operation so that inspection can be scheduled. Currently meat plants are required to renew their licence every three years, which requires resources for the completion of paperwork and is a financial cost for meat plant operators. A fee of \$300 is required under Ontario Regulation 223/05 Fees.

A licence renewal process is used as a way to ensure OMAFRA has current business information available, however, much of the information required for a licence renewal is unlikely to change over the years. If there are significant changes to the business or the facility there is a current regulatory requirement for operators to provide updates at the time they happen.

Proposed Amendments

The ministry is proposing to remove the requirement to renew a meat plant licence.

Meat plant operators would continue to require a licence and pay a one-time administrative fee of \$300. If there are significant changes to the business or facility, this information would continue to be required to be updated. For example, if additional operators become involved with the business, their names would be required to be added to the information that was submitted during licensing. If an operator begins to use a new or alternative water system (for example, a new well), then this update would also need to be submitted.

Voluntary Surrender of a Licence

When a meat plant operator chooses to no longer carry on their business, a licence is no longer required. For example, an operator may decide to pursue federal meat plant

inspection or they may decide to retire or sell their business. Currently, when an operator notifies the ministry that they would like to surrender their licence, a number of administrative steps must be taken. Currently, there is no process in place to voluntarily surrender a licence, therefore an OMAFRA Director must follow the administrative process used for revoking a licence which may take some time and impose additional administrative burden on the operator.

Proposed Amendments

It is proposed that the regulation be amended to allow operators to voluntarily surrender their meat plant licence when they no longer engage in licensed activities. This would reduce administrative burden for operators and the time required to no longer be licensed.

2. Clarifying Requirements to Provide More Business Opportunities

Update Processing Requirements for On-Farm Slaughter Carcasses

On-farm slaughter (also referred to in the Meat Regulation as “Non-Emergency Slaughter”) allows farmers to have their cattle (under 30 months of age) and swine slaughtered on their farm and have the carcasses processed at a provincial meat processing plant. The products can only be consumed by the farmer and their immediate family. Products cannot be sold, shared, donated or distributed.

The regulatory requirements for on-farm slaughter help to ensure the animal is slaughtered humanely and in hygienic conditions so that the carcass is suitable to enter a provincially licensed meat plant. Some of the requirements include: an examiner certified by OMAFRA must be present to perform ante mortem and post mortem inspection, supervise or perform the stunning and slaughter of the animal and the dressing of the carcass on the farm.

Currently, licensed meat plants are only permitted to accept on-farm slaughtered carcasses for up to a total of 16 weeks per year. This includes one or more consecutive weeks to a maximum of four weeks during the spring (March 1 to April 30) and one or more consecutive weeks for up to a total of 12 weeks during the fall (September 1 to December 31).

Proposed Amendments

The regulation would be amended to allow licensed meat plants to accept on-farm slaughtered carcasses during additional times of the year. The time periods during which carcasses could be accepted would be expanded to include January and February. Therefore, carcasses could be accepted at a meat plant at any time between September 1 and April 30.

In addition to expanding the number of months that carcasses can be accepted, the maximum number of weeks per year a meat plant is permitted to accept on-farm slaughter would no longer be restricted. This change would allow meat plant operators to process on-farm slaughtered carcasses 32 weeks of the year, instead of the current 16.

The changes would allow for more business opportunities for provincially licensed meat plants with no increased food safety risks.

Clarify Options for Slaughter on the Farmer's Premises

Farmers in Ontario are permitted to slaughter their own food animals on their premises for consumption by the farmer or the farmer's immediate family. The slaughter must be performed by the farmer and the meat cannot enter a meat plant and cannot be sold, shared, donated or distributed.

Alternatively, the slaughter may be performed by a certified examiner through the on-farm (non-emergency) slaughter process set out in the Meat Regulation and is permitted to enter the meat plant for processing. The meat from on-farm (non-emergency) slaughter is not permitted to be further distributed.

Proposed Amendments

Given that the farmer may not have the skills or expertise to perform the slaughter, the regulation would be amended to clearly allow the slaughter to be performed on behalf of the farmer. This change would permit someone other than the owner of the animal to perform the slaughter (for example, a professional butcher or another farmer).

All other restrictions would continue to apply: the slaughter must take place on the farmer's premises and the meat is for the consumption of the farmer and the farmer's immediate family and cannot be sold, shared, donated or distributed.

Streamline Emergency Slaughter Procedures

Emergency slaughter may be necessary if the animal is injured and cannot be transported without suffering or distress, if the animal has escaped, or if the animal cannot be loaded or transported without endangering itself, another person or another animal.

Emergency slaughter provisions in the Meat Regulation allow for the ante mortem inspection, slaughter and bleeding of a food animal outside of a slaughter plant and the transport of the carcass to a provincially licensed slaughter plant for dressing and post mortem inspection. If approved, the carcass can be processed. Meat processed from food animals slaughtered under the emergency slaughter provisions is fully inspected.

One of the current regulatory requirements includes ante mortem and post mortem approval by an inspector appointed by OMAFRA. However, if the animal requiring the emergency slaughter is injured, a veterinary inspector appointed by OMAFRA must conduct both the ante mortem and post mortem inspection.

A meat plant operator accepting the carcass from an emergency slaughter is responsible for a portion of the fees charged by the veterinary inspector.

Proposed Amendments

It is proposed that emergency slaughter procedures be streamlined by allowing an appointed non-veterinary inspector (i.e. Meat Hygiene Officer) to perform post mortem inspection at the slaughter plant. A veterinary inspector would still be required to perform the ante mortem inspection of the live, injured animal prior to an emergency slaughter.

Non-veterinary inspectors possess the skill and experience to perform post mortem inspections on a carcass after an emergency slaughter, as they would with any carcass at a provincially licensed slaughter plant. As always, if the non-veterinary inspector identifies an issue during post mortem inspection that requires further attention, an OMAFRA veterinary scientist would be consulted.

Emergency slaughter would become a more viable option for the slaughter of injured animals. The proposed change would result in reduced costs and in some cases, no cost, as the fees incurred by an operator for a non-veterinary inspector would be less than those charged for a veterinary inspector.

Clarify Hunted Game Provisions

The Meat Regulation sets out requirements for the hygienic processing of hunted game in provincially licensed meat plants. Hunted game carcasses are permitted in meat plants that have received OMAFRA approval to accept hunted game and that have met the standards for handling hunted game. Some of the standards include: record-keeping, labelling and identification, storage and cleaning and sanitation practices to prevent cross-contamination with inspected meat.

All hunted game carcasses and their products must be returned to the owner for consumption. They cannot be sold, shared, donated or distributed.

Proposed Amendments

The ministry is proposing to permit hunted game *products* at provincially licensed meat plants for further processing, in addition to hunted game carcasses. The same food safety standards would apply to both hunted game carcasses and hunted game products: all hunted game carcasses and products would be required to be returned to the owner for consumption and cannot be sold, shared, donated or distributed

The proposed change would better meet the demands of hunters and could provide additional business opportunities for meat plant operators.

Update Certain Exemptions for Consideration of Religious Practices

Provincially licensed meat plants play an important role in providing slaughter services that meet animal welfare and food safety standards while taking into consideration, religious practices and rituals throughout the year including during religious celebrations.

The Meat Regulation provides exemptions from certain requirements for religious or ritual slaughter and the demand for this type of slaughter has increased significantly over the past several years. To meet the high demand of carcasses for religious celebrations, meat plant operators can request carcasses be exempt from chilling before leaving the plant if the animal was slaughtered according to religion or ritual. Currently, these carcasses cannot be further distributed and must be provided only directly to the consumer(s) of the carcass. The consumer must visit the plant to pick up the carcass, often causing overcrowding at licensed meat plants and contributing to operational issues.

Proposed Amendments

To address the growing demand for ritual slaughter, the ministry is proposing to amend the regulation to allow for the distribution of carcasses to those other than direct consumers. This would mean that the temperature-exempt carcass from ritual slaughter could be further distributed to a third party or consumers at other locations (for example, at celebrations). Requirements for additional controls at the meat plant to mitigate potential risks of further distribution are also being considered.

The proposed amendments could help to deter illegal slaughter by meeting the demand for increased volume, while allowing for operational efficiencies at the slaughter plant since fewer people would need to visit the facility during busy religious holidays.

3. Moving to More Outcome Based Requirements

Remove the Requirement for a Water Sampling Tap and Backflow Prevention Device

Licensed meat plants are required to be supplied with potable water. Potable water is used for various activities in the plant including during slaughter, meat processing and cleaning. Meat plant operators must ensure that water used for these activities meets the drinking water quality standards set out under the *Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002*.

Currently, a dedicated tap is required in the meat plant, which may be used to collect water samples to test for water potability. The sampling tap is located at the point near which the water enters the plant to test for potability at that particular point in the system. The sampling tap helps the operator isolate the source of contamination if an issue is identified, but does not directly contribute to the safety of the water.

A water backflow prevention device is also currently required. The water backflow prevention device is used as a precautionary measure to protect against the reversal of water flow against normal direction. This may happen due to back siphonage of water or from back pressure.

Proposed Amendments

The ministry is proposing to remove the requirements for both a dedicated water sampling tap and a backflow device. Operators already have a responsibility under the regulation to ensure that they have a system in place to supply the meat plant with

potable water that is protected against contamination. This can be achieved without water sampling taps and backflow prevention devices. Operators would continue to be required to ensure their water supply is protected against contamination.

Removing these prescriptive requirements allows for flexibility in achieving food safety outcomes and will decrease costs during the construction of new meat plants or renovations of existing meat plants.

Summary

The ministry is seeking your feedback on the proposed amendments as outlined in this paper. Your feedback will be considered during the development of possible amendments.

The ministry is committed to ongoing review of the Meat Regulation. If there are additional opportunities for reducing burden in current requirements while protecting or enhancing food safety, that are not addressed in this paper, please let us know so that they may be considered as part of future regulatory proposals.

Questions for Consideration

Do you agree with the changes described in this proposal? Why or why not?

Do you have any specific concerns with any of the items discussed in the proposal?

Would the proposed changes reduce burden or contribute to additional opportunities for your business?

Email

andrea.smallwood@ontario.ca

Address

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Food Safety and Environmental Policy Branch

1 Stone Road West, 2nd Floor SW

Guelph, ON N1G 14Y2

c/o Andrea Smallwood

