

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

Vermont's State Inspected Mobile
Poultry Slaughter Unit

Vermont Meat Inspection

- The Vermont Meat Inspection Service runs a program that has been deemed “at least equal to” the federal governments Food Safety and Inspection Service. As such, all state inspected facilities must meet all requirements of the Federal Food Safety and Inspection Service

Mobile Timeline

- In early 2006 preliminary work was started to design a mobile poultry slaughter unit that would meet inspection requirements
- In late 2006 Vt. Agriculture's Ag development division prepared a survey for producers and also a survey to find perspective operators
- There were several interested parties but without being able to see the finished unit there was a bit of skepticism

Mobile timeline

- In 2007 Vermont Legislature approved \$80,000 for the build of the unit based on the preliminary design
- Once the drawings were put out to bid around January 2008, estimates ranging from \$256,000 to \$150,000 dollars were received
- Back to the Drawing board! Modifications were made to the plans and the final cost ended up at roughly \$93,000 May of 2008

Timeline con't.

- In order to cover the additional cost, the Ag Development section found \$3,000 dollars to put towards the project and solicited a grant from the Castanea Foundation, whose underlying belief is that the health of the regions agriculture is essential to the future of rural communities in Vermont and New York. This grant made the funding possible to complete the project. The unit was already in the process of being built and was finally delivered to Vermont in November of 2008

Timeline Con't.

- It was not until June of 2009 that an operator signed on the dotted line to operate the unit. Meat Inspection had no ties with the contracting of the operator in an effort to avoid any conflicts of interest except that we did specify any exemptions that may apply and required two weeks notification for scheduling purposes. The operator was required to develop Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point and Standard Sanitary Operating Procedures plans before inspection could be granted as well as an approved label to be applied to finished product.

Timeline con't.

- Operations began on August 31, 2009 and in the first season we provided 26 days of inspection for 14 different producers.
- The unit is not equipped with heat for year round use.
- For the 2010 season, which began on May 5th through the present we have provided inspection 41 days for 17 different producers

Exemptions

- 9 CFR 381.10 covers the allowable activities that poultry producers can work under. Generally the exemptions are for producers with less than 1000 birds slaughtered annually and producers of 1000 to 20,000 birds with a facility that meets the minimum requirements of 9 CFR 416.1 through 416.5
- Operations slaughtering more than 20,000 birds are required to operate under inspection as well as any operators that wish to sell to retail stores and producers slaughtering more than 1000 birds that wish to sell to restaurants
- Vermont does not allow the sale of exempt poultry in retail stores and until 2007, exempt poultry could only be sold from the farm

Exemptions

- In 2007 the Vermont legislature change the rules making it allowable to sell the exempt poultry at farmers markets and to restaurants if a producer slaughtered less than 1000 poultry per calendar year. The change forced the Vermont Department of Health to change it's rule which only allowed inspected and passed poultry to be sold at restaurants.
- After much debate and with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture and the Vermont Department of Health stating, for the record, no support for the proposed rule changes, 6 VSA 204 section 3312(b) was passed into law.
- Agriculture and Health were at least able to require specific labeling and handling requirements

Exemptions

- 6 VSA Chapter 204 section 3312(b) dictates the conditions that have to be met in order to sell at farmer's markets or to restaurants including but not limited to; specific labeling and handling instructions as well the terms "Exempt per 6 VSA 204 3312(b): Not Inspected" and limited the sales of whole birds only. Further if sold to restaurants the producer was to procure and supply the Vt. Department of Health with a certificate signed by the participating restaurant indicating that they understood the handling procedures and that the restaurant was aware that the menu item must include the name of the farm where produced and the term "not inspected"

Exemptions

- At least the Vermont Legislature recognized that the need to have access to inspected facilities was there and appropriated the funds for the development of the mobile poultry unit
- There were only a few inspected poultry processors that were offering inspected private label services before 2006 but when Avian Influenza became a major concern, these poultry processors, because they were also raising their own birds, decided that it was best not to allow birds from other locations on the premises

Exemptions

- Generally if a brick and mortar facility receives inspection they cannot produce birds without inspection, this is different than red meat. With the Mobile Poultry unit we do allow it to be used without inspection for producers that would qualify to produce under the exemptions, or want the poultry for their own use, provided that inspected and non-inspected do not occur on the same day, that the plant keeps HACCP and SSOP records as if under inspection and that exempt labeling is applied to the finished product in lieu of the inspection legend with the rationale that there are no facility requirements for the under 1000 bird producer and it is better to have them done in this facility rather than in the open air barn yard

Why can't I sell my chickens that are slaughtered at a non-inspected mobile unit to retail stores?

Traditional mobile slaughter unit



Vermont's Inspected slaughter unit



First Stage – “Dirty Room”

Scalder, plucker, hand wash sink and kick-out window with door to clean room



Wall mounted bleeding cones with electric stun knife and blood trough with drain



Second Stage – “Clean Room”

Clean room showing catch tray from plucker, hand wash and suspended dressing shackles



Clean room (from plucker end) showing shrink tank, foldable work table and door to office area



Clean room

Clean room with inedible trough and chill barrels (worker and inspector present)



Clean room prepared for travel



Other areas

Office space



restroom



Outside of unit

Stairs leading into the “clean room” – Door is equipped with automatic “air-curtain triggered when door is opened



Pull out ramp to aid with getting crated birds into the bleed area- there is also a rollout awning to help protect the crated birds from inclement weather



Storage and auxiliary areas

**Generator room and storage area
located in gooseneck section**



**Propane tank area in other side
of the gooseneck area**



Issues

- Waste water – there is a black water tank on the unit and although it can be dumped at any RV type dumping station, the operator was required to have a written letter stating authority to dump at a municipal dumping station as a backup plan
- Scald and rinse water as well as inedible viscera are all compostable materials and are generally left at the farm where they are generated, again the operator was required to obtain a written letter from a permitted commercial composter stating authority to accept the compost material as a backup plan
- Any discharges from the production area is managed to avoid runoff of wastes to adjoining waters, groundwater or across property boundaries as specified in Section 4.01 Discharges of Vermont's Accepted Agricultural Practices for Agricultural nonpoint source pollution reduction program

Issues

- Potable water for operations comes from the farm where the unit is stationed, before inspection can commence a water certificate from an approved lab showing no coli-form bacteria is present in the water system must be presented to the inspector.
- For Municipal systems the sample must be dated within one year and for private systems it must be dated within six months.

Issues

- Ice must also come from a tested approved source and is usually obtained by the mobile unit operator
- After slaughter, all birds must be chilled to an internal temperature of 40 degrees or less before the chill tank can be released for subsequent packaging and labeling
- As with all inspected operations, the operator must have tests performed by an accepted AOAC method for the presence of generic e-coli as a measure of sanitary dressing procedures. The testing usually begins the first full week of June and continues at a minimum of once per week of operations until 13 acceptable results are obtained as described in 9 CFR 381.94
- The operation is also subject to salmonella performance standards testing also described in 9 CFR 381.94

Operations

- The operator generally has a per bird fee plus the cost of ice for chilling and, depending on how far the location is from the home station in Morrisville, Vermont, a travel charge
- If using inspection and the number of birds at a particular location is at least 51% of the slaughter other producers may bring birds to that location for inspection
- If using the unit as an itinerant slaughterer without inspection, then the slaughtering must be performed on the poultry owners own premises and no birds can come from another location
- The operator, as a licensed commercial poultry slaughterhouse is entitled to 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week of inspection services at no charge

Questions?

