



**Ministry of Agriculture Intentions Paper:
RURAL SLAUGHTER MODERNIZATION**

September 4, 2020



Ministry of
Agriculture

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Introduction

British Columbia’s provincial meat inspection program aims to provide a credible regulatory system that is effective in ensuring food safety and animal welfare, while also providing sufficient flexibility to enable a competitive slaughter industry, and slaughter capacity for livestock producers across B.C. Changes to the program will advance the Ministry’s over-arching goals to strengthen our provincial food system and will be complimentary to the Buy BC, Grow BC and Feed BC initiatives.

Food safety at rural slaughter establishments is a high priority for the Province of British Columbia. Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health consider food safety as critical for controlling foodborne illnesses in B.C., public confidence in the B.C. food system, and a sustainable food industry in B.C.

The Ministry of Agriculture, with the support of the Ministry of Health, wants to improve rural meat inspection to realize efficiencies, minimize risks, ensure opportunity, and simplify practices for producers and processors while maintaining consumer confidence in meat products produced in B.C.

Simply put, we want to ensure that British Columbia has a client responsive and resource efficient regulatory approach that works for everyone to ensure economic opportunities and enhance safety of meat products around the province.

Background

In British Columbia, regulatory frameworks have developed in the meat production and processing industries with attention to a variety of factors specific to the province like sparse populations spread over large distances, unique geography and weather patterns, and economic drivers such as the availability of agricultural land (see Appendix A: B.C. Graduated Slaughter Licensing System).

This intentions paper is part of the ongoing work to assess opportunities for improvement and positive change that will strengthen our provincial food system and ensure a strong and growing local meat industry in B.C. for many years to come.

Statistics

Livestock Farms in B.C.

- In 2016 there were 15,867 farms producing livestock and poultry in B.C.

Animal Type	# of Farms in B.C.	# of Animals in B.C.
Poultry	6,710	22,048,072
Cattle	5,126	659,441
Sheep & Lamb	1,693	59,249
Hog	904	88,862
Other (Goats, Bison, Deer, Rabbits)	1,434	26,873
Total	15,867	22,882,497

source: Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture

Demand for Meat Products

- 2018 provincial meat consumption

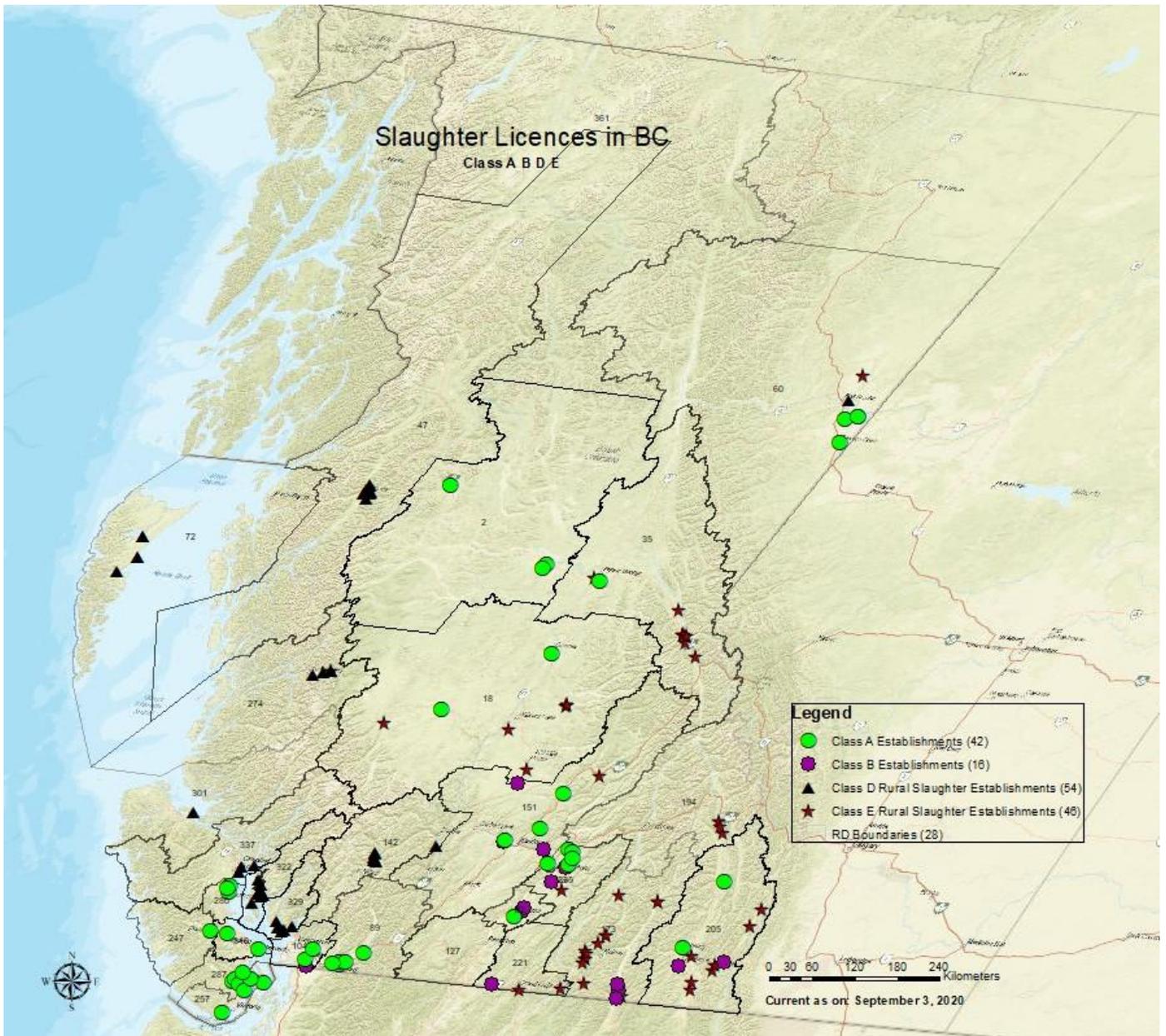
Meat Type	Provincial Consumption (kg)
Chicken, boneless weight	102,224,383
Beef	90,321,130
Pork	82,369,270
Turkey, boneless weight	16,903,955
Mutton and Lamb	4,751,112

source: Statistics Canada

Other Jurisdictions

British Columbia, along with Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador are the only provinces in Canada where consumer sales of uninspected meat products are permitted. British Columbia's system of licensed and inspected Class A and B abattoirs along with uninspected Class D and E rural establishments is unique and has evolved to meet our unique circumstances.

Number of Licenced Slaughter Facilities in B.C. (map)



Recent Consultation

From 2016-2019 consultation initiatives focused on rural meat production and inspection, and gathered comprehensive input from:

- the general public including farmers, producers and processors;
- current and former Class D and E licensees;
- industry associations across the livestock sector;
- regional health authorities; and
- local governments.



Many of the concerns and opinions expressed about local slaughter to both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fish and Food (the “Committee”) were also articulated during town hall engagement sessions focused on the Agricultural Land Reserve in fall 2019.

On September 28, 2018, the Committee released a report “Local Meat Production and Inspection in British Columbia.” The report made 21 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Province.

Progress on implementing the recommendations continues, including a significant change to allow Class E establishments within one-hour travel time of a licensed Class A or B facility, instead of the more restrictive two-hour limit that was in place before May 2019.

Ministry of Agriculture has also:

- delivered a series of food safety and animal welfare training workshops for rural producers;
- launched a comprehensive provincial slaughter capacity study that will serve as a baseline for future reviews of the B.C. Meat Inspection Program;
- highlighted local meat products as part of government’s Buy B.C. campaign; and
- provided funding through the federal-provincial Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) program for food safety and traceability program development.

On June 11, 2020, the Province designated three new areas for Class D rural slaughter licensing: Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, Electoral Area D in Regional District of Central Kootenay, and Electoral Area H in Regional District of Fraser-Fort George.

One of the dominant themes of recent consultation is that administration of all provincial slaughter should be consolidated under the Ministry of Agriculture. On August 19, 2020, the Ministry announced that responsibility for administration of rural slaughter (Class D and E licences), which is overseen by regional health authorities currently, will be returning to the Ministry of Agriculture effective December 1, 2020.

Opportunities

1. Public Health & Safety



Food safety at rural slaughter establishments is a priority for the Provincial Government. We heard repeatedly from farmers, producers and those involved in production and the sale of B.C. meat who all want the food safety system to deliver high levels of food safety for consumers.

Updated Risk Assessment

Ministry of Agriculture will undertake a risk assessment project to support development options for rural meat production. The work will update an assessment from 2009 and will inform all aspects of food safety policy to lower risk and improve efforts to prevent food-borne illnesses such as those related to salmonella in poultry.

Updated Training

Other opportunities include developing updated training materials to improve guidance on slaughter practice, animal welfare and food safety. This improved training would provide provincially consistent and effective learning opportunities for rural producers.

Updated Rural Code of Practice

In addition to training, an updated rural code of practice with a requirement for standard operating procedures in rural facilities would build on current practices to establish higher standards and provide improved clarity about requirements for administrators and operators.

Oversight

More comprehensive, more frequent and more consistent oversight of food safety plans, standard operating procedures, record-keeping by rural operators and operational practices by Ministry of Agriculture inspectors with experience and training in slaughter practice, animal welfare and food safety will also contribute to improved public health outcomes.

Increased Frequency of Rural Inspections

Ministry of Agriculture's resumption of responsibility for rural slaughter administration comes with a commitment to increasing the frequency of government inspector visits to rural abattoirs. Public reporting on inspections and compliance results will support consumer confidence that controls are in place for ensuring adherence to regulations.

Increased inspection frequency by Ministry of Agriculture inspectors will improve food safety and animal welfare outcomes, while offering protection for small-scale producers and the industry from unsafe practices and criticism, and potential negative impacts to communities of a food-borne illness event.

Education Before Enforcement

The Ministry acknowledges that rural operators play a vital role in feeding their regions, and have a vested interest in providing only the safest meat to their customers. Every effort will be made to work with operators to inform them about implementing an updated rural code of practice with an emphasis on ensuring compliance.

2. Innovation



The Ministry of Agriculture is reviewing the entire slaughter licensing framework for opportunities to innovate and improve standards and simplify administration in a way that maintains all the high standards of food safety and animal welfare expected by B.C. consumers.

Alternatives to Traditional Inspection

To support rural slaughter and improve oversight, Ministry of Agriculture is exploring opportunities to expand the use of agri-technologies, such as virtual inspections, as alternatives to the traditional model of having an inspector present during slaughter.

The Ministry is investigating technical, policy and legal aspects of ideas like remote ante-mortem inspection, delayed “cold” post-mortem inspection, and how third parties can be engaged to efficiently provide cost-effective inspection in remote communities. We are also developing a new approach to encourage mobile slaughter businesses.

Regulatory Changes

Consideration will be given to aspects of rural slaughter regulation such as: volume of production; available markets for local meat products (farmgate vs. commercial retail and restaurants), and the geographic scope of where producers can sell their product. It is important to balance risk with other administrative changes to increase frequency of inspection oversight, ensure compliance with new improved operating standards, and improve training and education for operators.

Innovation is important not only for consideration of high-level frameworks but also for fundamental details such as re-defining regulatory terminology in a way that makes sense to all users of the system. For example, rather than Class A, B, D and E labels more intuitive licence type labels could help the public understand the service a licence holder can provide. Different types of licences might also be considered.

3. Regulatory Efficiency

Realizing Efficiencies

Review of government roles and responsibilities indicates that single agency administration by Ministry of Agriculture for all provincial slaughter will improve efficiency, reduce stakeholder confusion and improve oversight. Ministry of Agriculture is also exploring the opportunity of working with FrontCounter BC to improve the licensing application process and promote better accessibility across the province.

Transferring administration of rural slaughter to Ministry of Agriculture also supports health authorities who may be unable to accommodate the demands of an increasing number of rural slaughter licences, especially during a global pandemic when their priority is addressing front line public health challenges.

Collaboration

The transfer of responsibility for slaughter administration to Ministry of Agriculture will require ongoing collaboration with health authorities on food safety matters related to the food premises where meat products are processed and sold to the public. Improving collaboration between Ministry of Agriculture and health authorities will remain as important as ever to both partners and their shared interests in maintaining high standards for public health.

Animals raised for food must be treated humanely. Legislation is in place to require compliance with food safety and animal protection standards. Improved training as a component of the licensing requirements for rural operators and increased inspection oversight by Ministry of Agriculture inspectors along with ongoing training and education opportunities could further support good practices already being followed.



4. Strengthening our Provincial Food Supply

Local food supply security is an important matter for British Columbians that has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting impacts to the entire agriculture sector.



Increased Access to Local Meat

Local producers depend on their reputation to maintain the viability of their business. Consumer demand has increased for local meat due to meat supply chain disruptions and the increased awareness of the importance of a resilient local food system. With increased demand for local supply, retailers will also seek sufficient reliable local supply where it is available. Increased inspection and compliance monitoring for rural operators to confirm that they are continuing to uphold standards will support food supply security and sustain high public confidence in the local meat supply.

Developing a resilient and diverse food supply chain for British Columbia can help to mitigate large scale production disruption. A change to rural slaughter administration at this time must highlight local food supply security, support for recovery of the agriculture sector, and consideration of evolving public health issues, including freeing up health resources needed to focus on front-line efforts.

This Intentions Paper is the latest step the B.C. Government is taking to create opportunities for livestock producers in rural parts of the province, and contributes to larger efforts to increase overall food production and security. The B.C. Government is strengthening our provincial food system and supporting economic activity through programs and policies like Grow BC, which connects farmers to the resources they need to farm, and Feed BC which results in more B.C. grown and processed foods served in public institutions like hospitals. The B.C. Government is also making it easier for consumers to identify products with a Buy BC label so they can enjoy trusted, local foods while supporting our communities and economy. To learn more about the programs and resources available to help farmers, fishers and food processors in B.C. please visit <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/programs> or contact the Ministry of Agriculture at 1-888-221-7141.

Providing Comment on Rural Slaughter Modernization

The Ministry of Agriculture will develop and finalize approaches suggested in this intentions paper and begin regulatory and policy change by late fall 2020.

Following review of comments and submissions, the Ministry of Agriculture will complete an action plan for implementation. Those interested are invited to submit comments by email to bcmeatinspection@gov.bc.ca, or in writing to:

Ministry of Agriculture
c/o B.C. Meat Inspection program
PO Box 9120 Stn Prov Gov't
Victoria B.C. V8W 9B4

Comments should be made on or before October 19, 2020.

All submissions will be reviewed for inclusion in a summary report. Comments received will be treated with confidentiality and collected under section 26(c) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA). Please note that comments you provide and information that identifies you as the source of those comments may be publicly available if a Freedom of Information request is made under FOIPPA. If you have questions about the collection of this information, please contact the Food Safety and Inspection Branch Policy and Project Analyst at 778 974-3349, or at the address provided above.



Appendix A: Graduated Slaughter Licensing System

Licence Type	Activities Permitted	Sales Permitted	Geographic Scope	# of Animal Units	AGRI Oversight	Health Authority Oversight
Class A	Slaughter and cut-and-wrap	Yes, retail and direct to consumer	All of B.C.	Unlimited	Pre and post slaughter inspection of each animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut-and-wrap (processing) • Retail sales • Water testing
Class B	Slaughter only	Yes, retail and direct to consumer	All of B.C.	Unlimited	Pre and post slaughter inspection of each animal	Water testing
Class D	Slaughter only (own animals and other producers' animals)	Yes, retail and direct to consumer	<p>Licences restricted to prescribed regional districts in the rural area of B.C.</p> <p>Sales restricted within the regional district where meat is produced</p>	1 - 25	N/A (NOTE Dec 1, 2020: slaughter administration to AGRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic site assessments and audit of operational slaughter records. • Cut and wrap (processing) • Retail sales • Water testing
Class E	Slaughter only (own animals only)	Direct to consumer only (farmgate and farm market)	Sales restricted within the regional district where meat is produced	1 - 10	N/A (NOTE Dec 1, 2020: slaughter administration to AGRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic site assessments and audit of operational slaughter records. • Cut and wrap (processing) • Retail sales • Water testing
Personal use - No licence required	Slaughter only	None	For producer only	Unlimited	N/A	N/A

Note: "Animal unit" means a combined animal weight, when measured alive, of 455 kg (1 000 lbs).



Appendix B: Designated Regional Districts in Schedule 2 under the Meat Inspection Regulation

1. Central Coast Regional District
2. Kitimat-Stikine Regional District
3. Mount Waddington Regional District
4. qathet Regional District
5. North Coast Regional District
6. Squamish-Lillooet Regional District
7. Strathcona Regional District, other than the land located on Vancouver Island
8. Sunshine Coast Regional District
9. Northern Rockies Regional Municipality
10. Stikine Region
11. Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District
12. Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (Electoral Area 'H' only)
13. Regional District of Central Kootenay (Electoral Area 'D' only)