CUSTOM MEAT GUIDE · STEP 1: BEFORE YOU BUY

What Is Custom-Exempt Meat?

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THE SHORT ANSWER

Custom-exempt meat comes from an animal you own, slaughtered and processed for you by a licensed custom processor. It isn't inspected for sale, so it's marked **"Not for Sale"** and is only for your household and non-paying guests. You can't sell it or trade it.

Store Meat vs. Custom Meat

Beef and pork at the grocery store come from plants where an inspector checks the animals and carcasses, so the meat can be sold by the cut to anyone. Custom meat skips that step because it's never sold. The animal belongs to you before it's slaughtered, and it's processed only for you. That's the "exemption" in custom-exempt, and it's written into both federal law and Washington's rules.

It doesn't mean nobody is watching. In Washington, custom slaughterers and custom meat shops are licensed by the Department of Agriculture, which inspects the facility and equipment before it issues a license, and the licenses renew every year. Our shop is licensed by WSDA as a custom meat facility.

Who Can Eat It

Custom-exempt meat is for the owner of the animal, their household, and guests they don't charge. Washington's rules mean it can't be:

- sold, whether by the package, by the pound, or to a restaurant or store,
- traded or bartered for something else, or
- donated to a food bank.

Why You Buy a Live Animal

Because the meat itself can't be sold, buying beef or pork from a rancher works by buying the **animal**, or a share of it, while it's alive. The rancher sells you a whole, half, or quarter before slaughter, and the processing is done for you as an owner. That's why you pay the rancher for the animal and pay us separately for processing. Our guide to buying a whole, half, or quarter beef walks through it.

What "Not for Sale" Means

Washington requires custom meat to be marked "Not for Sale" while it's in the processor's hands. The label is about who may use the meat: it was processed for you, not made to be sold. It's the normal label on every custom order.

What Else the Rules Say

- Your ground meat comes only from the animal you own, or own a share of.
- You get a written record with the carcass weight and the net weight of your meat.
- Washington recommends dividing an animal among no more than eight owners.

Raising Your Own?

The same rules apply when the animal is yours from the start. Howard comes to your farm for the slaughter, we cut and wrap it here, and the meat is for your household. See on-farm mobile slaughter.

Questions? Call Howard & Mia.

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Read it online, with calculators:
handmcustommeat.com/guide/custom-exempt-meat/

Sources

Custom Meat FAQs, Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://agr.wa.gov/departments/food-safety/food-safety/custom-meats/faqs

Custom Meat license summary, Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://agr.wa.gov/Services/Licenses-Permits-and-Certificates/Summary-Descriptions/Custom-Meat

Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, Goat and Other Meat (Fact Sheet 27), Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://cms.agr.wa.gov/WSDAKentico/Documents/DO/RM/RM/27_SellingBeefPorkLambGoatAndOtherMeat.pdf

Licensed custom meat businesses (monthly list), Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://cms.agr.wa.gov/WSDAKentico/Documents/FSCS/Food%20Safety/Firm%20Lists/CustomMeatList.xlsx

Custom Meat Record-Keeping Tips for Farmers, Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://agr.wa.gov/departments/business-and-marketing-support/small-farm/meat-and-poultry-assistance/resources/custom-meat-record-keeping-tips-for-farmers

9 CFR 303.1, Exemptions (custom slaughter), Electronic Code of Federal Regulations
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-9/chapter-III/subchapter-A/part-303/section-303.1

Figures are typical ranges from these sources; every animal is different. Prices are subject to change.