



## Charitable Deer Processing Guidance

Charitable processing and donation of venison through programs such as *Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry* is permitted by processors that are licensed and inspected by the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), Office of Food Protection (OFP). Any charity (including churches and food banks) is allowed to work directly with a butcher who is licensed as a custom deer processor by the OFP to have donated deer processed for poor/underserved populations. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources manages a grant program for the state that is open to any charitable entity organizing such a program. The goal of the cooperation between venison donation programs and OFP is to ensure that those butchering legally harvested deer and handling meat products are able to meet sanitation standards and adhere to safe food processing practices.

New participating processors must apply to OFP, Center for Facility and Process Review (FAPR) for a review of their operation, including on-site inspection before receiving a license to process donated deer for charitable distribution. Participating processors must schedule an annual inspection with the OFP Center for Food Processing (CFP) for consideration of license renewal. There is no fee for participating in the program. The license described here is not required for custom deer processing for individual hunters.

### Licensing and Plan Review Requirements:

- Complete a Plan Review application provided on the MDH Facility and Process Review website [here](#), and email it to [mdh.foodplanreview@maryland.gov](mailto:mdh.foodplanreview@maryland.gov).
- Application must:
  - Include a drawing that shows the layout and arrangement of work areas, including location of all food equipment, such as hand sink, toilet, utility sinks, floor drains, and hose stations.
  - Specify the construction materials used for the building, and interior floor, wall, and ceiling finishes.
  - Specify how and where carcasses and other food waste are stored and disposed.
  - Specify whether the potable water supply is from a private well or through a public water supply.
    - If the water supply is a well, provide a copy of the most recent test results, if available. If unavailable, MDH will sample the well before granting approval to operate, and annually after that.
  - Specify the method of sewage disposal, as private or a public system.
    - If on a private septic system, the system must be properly functioning upon inspection by MDH.

### Facility Requirements:

- The walls and floor of the processing area must be smooth, washable, easily cleanable, and impervious to water.
- Doors and windows in the processing area must be vermin proof.
- Lighting must be shielded or shatterproof in processing areas and be adequate to facilitate cleaning.
- All food contact equipment and surfaces must be designed, constructed, and maintained to be smooth, easily cleanable and in good repair.
- There must be adequate hand washing facilities and the ability to wash, rinse, and sanitize equipment and utensils.

### Processing Requirements:

- Deer must be legally harvested.
- Gutting and skinning of the deer and butchering operations shall be separated by time or distance. If the same space is to be used for both, the area must be cleaned and sanitized between uses.
- Processing of other animal species must be separated by time or distance.
- Hanging meat carcasses must be stored at an internal temperature of 41°F or less.
- Deer may be processed for distribution only as fresh or frozen raw whole cuts, or raw ground 100% venison.
- Organ meat may not be donated.
- If fresh cuts of meat will be distributed, refrigerated storage and transport that will maintain 41°F or less is required.
- The processed meat must be maintained frozen solid for frozen storage. Heavy-duty, non-commercial freezers are acceptable.
- Thermometers must be provided for each refrigeration/freezer unit and placed in a conspicuous location.
- Meat must be labeled/coded in some fashion to prevent commingling and for identification purposes in the event of a problem/recall.
- Safe handling instructions and cooking instructions must be provided. (Deer, whether whole or ground, must be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F for 15 seconds).

**Processing Recommendations—Good Manufacturing Practices for Food Safety and Risk Reduction:**

- Deer should not touch the ground after the hide, hooves, tail, and head have been removed.
- Any area on the carcass that appears to be contaminated or unwholesome, including inside the body cavity, should be discarded, (e.g., nicked bowels/bladder producing a foul odor, discoloration in body cavity, exterior meat discoloration, obvious ground contamination, tumors, etc.). *When in doubt, throw it out.*
- All workers must wash hands before entering the facility, when handling food and between tasks.
- Food contact equipment should be washed, rinsed and sanitized. Use sanitizer test strips to verify adequate strength.
- All previously cleaned food contact surfaces and utensils should be sanitized before start-up and cleaned and sanitized as needed during processing.
- Processing area should be clear of all unnecessary items when processing.
- Chemicals should be stored separately from the food contact areas.

**For further information contact:**

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