



Meat processing in Wisconsin

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)

Why is the meat processing industry important to Wisconsin?

Wisconsin is home to a robust meat processing industry with a long history and prosperous future. The state's meat industry has a firm foundation in our thousands of livestock producers and hundreds of meat establishments, which process safe and high-quality meat products for consumers in Wisconsin, across the country, and around the world.

What kinds of meat are inspected?

All meat products sold to consumers must be processed at a state or federally inspected facility. This includes traditional meat products from the carcass such as, sides, quarters, halves, loins, and steaks. It also includes meat that is further processed such as sausage, bratwurst, and products that contain meat such as pizza, egg rolls, or other entrees.

Why does the state or federal government need to inspect meat?

The basis for meat inspection is firmly rooted in principles of food safety and animal health, with a goal of ensuring a clean, wholesome, safe product. Some examples of the principles and practices DATCP follows are:

Food safety

- Ensure sanitary operation to reduce the risk of foodborne illness
- Confirm the structure of the facility meets standards to reduce risk for cross contamination
- Audit food labels for appropriate information and compliance with safe labeling laws
- Require processors to operate under a HACCP (Hazard analysis and critical control points) system for ensuring food safety.
- Complete sampling for pathogenic microbes such as *Salmonella*, certain types of *Escherichia coli*, and *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Animal health

- Ensure humane handling and slaughter of all animals
- Complete an antemortem (before death) inspection of live animals to rule out any diseases or health conditions
- Complete a postmortem (after death) inspection of the carcass and all animal parts
- Ensure that carcasses contain no illegal residues of drugs such as antibiotics

What is required in slaughter inspections and processing inspections?

- Slaughter inspections verify that animal health, humane handling, and sanitary slaughter and dressing requirements are met. Slaughter inspection also verifies that the meat establishment applies an antimicrobial intervention treatment to certain carcasses. An inspector must be present to inspect livestock before, during and after slaughter.
- Processing inspections verify that important food safety steps such as cooking and cooling are done within specified time and temperature limits. With some exceptions, an inspector must visit a plant every day that processing is occurring.
- Custom-exempt meat establishments perform slaughter and processing activities as a service for the animal owner. Custom exempt meat establishments are only subject to periodic, risk-based inspection since this meat is not eligible for retail or wholesale transactions.

What are the different types of meat inspection?

Type	# of establishments (as of 05/01/2025)	Description
State-licensed official	225 Slaughter: 76 Non-slaughter: 149 CIS: 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can only sell meat products within the state borders, unless the establishment is part of the Cooperative Interstate Meat Shipment (CIS) program• Has state inspectors on site for slaughter and processing• Mark products as state-inspected
State-licensed custom exempt	69	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can only slaughter and process livestock or poultry for the exclusive use of the animal or carcass owner(s)• Only subject to a periodic, risk-based inspection by state meat inspectors• Must label meat as 'Not for Sale'
Federal	228	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May ship their products interstate and internationally• Inspected and regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)• Mark products as federally inspected
TOTAL	522	

Why would a meat processing plant choose to be state inspected?

Wisconsin is privileged to be one of 29 states that have a state meat and poultry inspection program. Our state meat inspection program is one of the largest and is widely recognized as one of the best in the country. State inspection is required by law [9 CFR 321.1 (a)] to be "at least equal to" federal inspection in terms of requirements and processes. State-licensed meat establishments have the benefit of excellent customer service, more flexibility in scheduling inspections, and a quick response from state program staff.

What is the Cooperative Interstate Shipment program?

The Cooperative Interstate Shipment (CIS) program allows state-inspected meat establishments to operate as federally inspected facilities, under specific conditions, and ship their product across state lines. Wisconsin is one of only ten states in the country to have a CIS program. To be part of the CIS program, there are several steps states must follow beyond operating a state meat and poultry inspection program, such as demonstrating they have authority under their own laws and providing certain documentation that procedures identical to federal procedures will be used while inspecting the participating establishments. To participate in a state's CIS program, state-inspected meat establishments must meet specific requirements and apply through the state[1].

How does one become a state meat inspector?

DATCP currently employs 70 meat safety inspectors across the state. These inspectors must complete extensive training from both DATCP and USDA and receive specialized federal credentials upon completion. Job postings are listed on wisc.jobs.

What does a DATCP meat inspector do?

Inspectors conduct processing inspections at four meat establishments per day on average. Almost all inspectors are normally scheduled to oversee at least one slaughter inspection per week. An inspector's duties typically include:

- Perform ante- and postmortem (before and after death) inspections of meat animals and poultry
- Evaluate a meat establishment's basic sanitation and adherence to their sanitation standard operating procedures (SSOP)
- Verify the design and implementation of the establishment's HACCP system
- Evaluate meat and poultry product labels
- Collect meat product samples and evaluate results

Contact

For more information on meat processing licensing, contact DATCP's Meat and Poultry Licensing Team, (608) 224-4694, datcpmeatpoultrylicensing@wi.gov

Citations

[1] U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service - <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/inspection/apply-grant-inspection/state-inspection-programs/cooperative-interstate-shipping-program>