



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**NEW CLARIFICATION OF ON-FARM POULTRY PROCESSING REGULATIONS
A BOON FOR NORTH CAROLINA PASTURED POULTRY**

Alexandria, VA— This June, [Animal Welfare Approved](#) (AWA) and [Wild Turkey Farms](#) co-hosted a poultry processing workshop using a Mobile Processing Unit (MPU)--essentially a slaughterhouse on wheels that can be moved from farm to farm as needed. The MPU was funded by Animal Welfare Approved and built by farmer Lee Menius of Wild Turkey Farms as part of AWA's Good Husbandry Grants program. The MPU came at time when a new clarification of processing regulations could greatly expand markets for pastured poultry in North Carolina.

The [North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Meat and Poultry Inspection Division](#) (MPID) announced the new clarification last week to much fanfare, and confirmed that the requirements of the 1,000-bird exemption would also apply to operations slaughtering up to 20,000 birds. Yesterday, the MPID released a follow-up notice, which gives further clarification and offers farmers a straightforward path to providing farm-processed poultry to a rapidly growing market.

According to AWA Outreach and Grants Coordinator Emily Lancaster, the MPU workshop provided poultry farmers with valuable hands-on experience. "We really feel that the MPID is ahead of the curve in recognizing the importance of mobile processing and the need to open up markets for farmers. The MPU workshop at Wild Turkey Farms was a big success and illustrated that the North Carolina Department of Agriculture's (NCDA) support for on-farm processing is not unfounded."

The mobile nature of the MPU unit has two distinct benefits: less transport stress on the birds and increased economic viability for the farmer. Menius is able to lower processing costs and to derive even more income through renting the unit to other farmers in the area. Menius explained, "The interest has been overwhelming; we are selling every bird we can raise." He continued, "We sincerely appreciate AWA's support in making this possible." The new clarification from the NCDA means that Lee will now be able to process up to 20,000 birds annually using the MPU, instead of being limited to 1,000.

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With the new opportunities, however, come important responsibilities for farmers utilizing the exemption. Food safety and environmental responsibility were emphasized during the recent workshop, as AWA Program Director Andrew Gunther demonstrated humane slaughter along with basic sanitation and waste disposal. Staff from the NCDA, including MPID Director Don Delozier, explained the relevant regulations for on-farm processing and how to achieve compliance. "Our intent is to visit all on-farm processing locations in the state, and to conduct additional visits annually and as needed. This is not processing without inspection; the exemption simply means that farms are not required to be inspected daily. However, farmers will be expected to meet all of the necessary regulatory requirements and to keep detailed records of their compliance. We are looking forward to assisting farmers in this process and encourage them to contact us with any questions."

Commenting on the recent rise of farmer and consumer interest in on-farm processing, Delozier said, "We anticipate seeing more home-grown poultry moving into commerce within the state, opening up opportunities for a steady flow of year-round poultry production to supply farmers markets and other consumers." Local food advocates see this as a clear signal of state support for local food systems and their growth, and as evidence of a growing understanding that when basic sanitary and food safety requirements are met, farm-processed products can be just as safe as any coming out of a larger plant.

In fact, this acceptance of farm-processed poultry has roots at the federal level. One significant change in federal regulation for poultry processing has been the replacement of the word "facility" with "location." This language was designed to include less traditional slaughter methods, like the AWA-funded MPU at Wild Turkey Farms. After observing the unit in use at the workshop Delozier reported, "This would be an example of a compliant system."

AWA looks forward to working with farmers and state officials to create a high-integrity food system based on local farms and responsible production. For more details about the exemption clarification, visit www.ncagr.gov/meatpoultry. For more information about Animal Welfare Approved, including farm certification, Good Husbandry Grants, and a searchable database of farms and products visit www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org.

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Animal Welfare Approved audits and certifies family farms that raise their animals with the highest animal welfare standards, outdoors, on pasture or range. The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) has lauded these standards for two years running as being the most stringent when compared to other third-party certification programs. Visit www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org for a searchable database of approved farms and restaurants, shops and markets where our farmers' products are sold. Choose the one independent food label that means healthy, safe, environmentally responsible and humanely raised.

AWA's Good Husbandry Grants Program is now accepting applications for projects to improve farm animal welfare with a focus on the following funding priorities: increased outdoor access, improved genetics and improved slaughter facilities. Current Animal Welfare Approved farmers and those who have applied to join the program are eligible for grants up to \$5,000. Slaughter plants working with AWA farmers are also eligible to apply. Visit www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org or contact Emily Lancaster at Emily@AnimalWelfareApproved.org or 919.428.1641 for more information.