



Venison Processing in Retail Grocery Stores

The Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) Food and Dairy Division licenses and inspects grocery stores to ensure that food is safe, unadulterated, and not sold in a fraudulent or deceptive manner. The Food Code contains specific requirements that retail stores must meet in order to handle hunter taken wild game.

MDARD, working cooperatively with Michigan State University, has developed guidelines for retail grocery stores to assist them in following food safety regulations for processing venison and other wild game and to assure a safe, wholesome food supply for consumers.

The following resource is available for retail stores that process venison and other wild game:

- https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/-/media/Project/Websites/mdard/documents/food-dairy/fspr_vp_deer_processing_brochure.pdf

The guidelines address basic hygiene and sanitation during processing; concerns related to lead fragments in venison from lead ammunition; and precautions to take when processing wild game due to the existence of bovine Tuberculosis (TB) in wild deer in parts of Michigan, and the discovery of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in free ranging white tailed deer.

Why Monitor Hunter Taken Venison Processing?

The discovery of bovine TB and CWD in wild deer in Michigan has focused public attention on diseases that may have the potential to be transmitted to humans.

Research indicates that the risk is low for humans to get bovine TB by eating properly cooked venison. However, the potential exists for the spread of bacterial contamination within a retail store and to other foods if wild game processing is not conducted under strict procedures that control cross-contamination. The specific challenges include:

- Ensuring that wild game meat is kept strictly separate from the commercial food in the establishment.
- Controlling filth from hides and loose deer hair throughout the store.
- Providing adequate cold storage capacity to maintain carcasses and meat at 41° F or below, in order to limit bacterial growth.
- Having sanitation procedures in place to assure all common areas and equipment are cleaned and sanitized before and after wild game processing.

Additional information on bovine TB and CWD can be found on Michigan's Emerging Diseases website at www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases.

All foods processed in an MDARD licensed establishment must be handled in a safe and sanitary manner, whether they are commercial foods or wild game intended for the hunter.

What is the Variance Requirement for Retail Food Establishments?

The Food Code (Section 3-502.11) states that a food establishment must obtain a variance from MDARD before custom processing wild game. By tracking the stores that process wild game through this variance, MDARD can assure that venison processing is carried out safely across the state and that controls are in place to reduce the risk of cross contamination. A simple "Wild Game Processing at Retail [Variance Request Form](#)" has been developed to assist store owners in obtaining the variance.

How Can I Meet the Variance Requirement for Custom Processing Wild Game in my Grocery Store?

To meet the variance requirement for custom processing of venison or other wild game in a retail grocery store, you must:

- Meet the sanitation requirements of the Food Code.
- Document your procedure by detailing the step-by-step handling of wild game in your store from receiving through finished product delivery. You may use the "Processing Guide and Sanitation Requirements for Retail Food Establishments" for your procedure if you follow the guidelines and indicate additional steps you use. This is the minimum requirement. Operators should develop more detailed documents if their processing drastically varies from the guidelines. Food processes such as curing and smoking may require a specialized meat processing variance.

What will inspectors look for at my store?

MDARD food inspectors may conduct an inspection of your store during the venison processing season. The inspector will determine if you are following the sanitation requirements in the Food Code. The inspector will also check to see if your venison handling procedures are documented, meet the safety requirements, and are being followed.

If the inspector determines that major deviations exist in your procedures, corrective action or additional documentation may be required such as a complete Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) plan.

If I have more questions, who do I contact?

For more information, contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development at 800-292-3939. You will be connected to a regional supervisor or your inspector for additional assistance.