



What We Heard

Development of Meat Safety Regulations Under
the *Public Health Act*

APRIL | 2022



If you would like this information in another official language, call us.

English

Si vous voulez ces informations dans une autre langue officielle, contactez-nous.

French

Kīspin ki nitawih̄tīn ē nīh̄yawih̄k ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.

Cree

Tłıchq̄ yatı k'èè. Dı wegodi newq̄ dè, gots'ō gonede.

Tłıchq̄

ʔerih̄t'ıs Dēne Sų́nė yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theᓯᓯ ᓯat'e, nuwe ts'ēn yóttı.

Chipewyan

Edı gondı dehgáh got'je zhatıé k'éé edat'éh enahddhę nıde naxets'é edahıı.

South Slavey

K'áhshó got'jne xədə k'é hederı ᓯedjht'é yerıııwę nıde dúle.

North Slavey

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijáhch'uu zhit yınohthan jı', diıts'at ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqłuta.

Inuvialuktun

Ć^bđ< ǀǀ^{sb}Δ^c ǀǀǀǀǀǀ^c Δ^bǀǀǀǀǀ^cǀǀǀǀǀ^b, Δ^cǀǀǀǀǀ^c Δ^bǀǀǀǀǀ^cǀǀǀǀǀ^c.

Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

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Executive Summary

The overarching goal of the Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT) Department of Health and Social Services (Department) is to promote, protect and provide for the health and well-being of the people of the Northwest Territories (NWT). The Department is responsible for developing legislation and regulations as part of the governing framework to support its goals.

There are a variety of local food supply initiatives across the NWT, including farmers' and community markets, community greenhouses, and small commercial enterprises. There are currently no federal or territorial slaughter facilities operating in the NWT and, while there is limited meat production in general, there is an interest to allow on-farm processing and slaughter of meat.

Increasing food security through locally produced and harvested food is a priority of the 19th Legislative Assembly. As one of the Department's legislative initiatives to support food security, a meat safety regulatory framework for the sale of locally produced meat products is under development. This step is necessary because the former Meat Inspection Regulations under the previous *Public Health Act* were repealed in 2009.

As part of a broader GNWT regulatory framework for agriculture, new regulations under the *Public Health Act* are required to regulate premises involved in the slaughter of animals and the safe preparation, storage, and distribution of meat from these premises for sale and human consumption. Given the unique and varied types of operations in the NWT, the regulations must provide sufficient flexibility to allow for these types of operations, while ensuring public safety. Meat Safety Regulations are expected to be implemented in 2023.

From December 15, 2021, to February 17, 2022, the Department sought feedback and input from the public and stakeholders on the Discussion Paper "Meat Safety Regulations in the NWT". The Discussion Paper was made available to the public on the GNWT and Department websites, and shared with Members of the Legislative Assembly, stakeholders, and organizations.

There were 12 written submissions received via email and 32 individuals provided comments on the English and French Facebook posts. The results of the public and stakeholder engagement are summarized in this *What We Heard Report* and will be used to inform development of regulations as this initiative progresses.

Next steps

The results of the public engagement, together with cross-jurisdictional reviews and additional policy research, will inform the development of regulations to facilitate the availability of locally raised meat or meat products, and set standards and other requirements to ensure safe handling practices that protect public health.

Introduction

The Department is working to develop Meat Safety Regulations under the *Public Health Act*. These new Regulations are intended to facilitate the availability of locally raised animals in the NWT for meat or meat products and set standards and other requirements to ensure safe handling practices that protect public health.

The Meat Safety Regulations will not apply to the harvesting or sale of wild fish, game species, or reindeer. Existing federal and territorial legislation and any agreements which oversee the harvesting and sale of wild game, reindeer and fish would still apply to those activities and products.

The *Public Health Act* provides the GNWT with the legal authority to protect the health of NWT residents from a broad range of health risks that may be present in several settings. These settings include day cares, restaurants, public pools, municipal water treatment and sanitation, as well as oversight on public health functions relating to immunization, disease reporting and surveillance, and communicable disease management. The *Public Health Act* also provides for the authority to create regulations related to food and premises where animals are killed.

The Department's role in public health protection is to identify factors which create risk to public health, to monitor compliance to standards and intervene, if necessary, to ensure that these risks are minimized or eliminated. Environmental Health Officers provide these health protection services and have a role in educating organizations and businesses on healthy practices.

Today, a permit under the *Food Establishment Safety Regulations* is required to sell food and that food must be liable to inspection unless otherwise exempted under the Regulations. There is no mechanism to inspect meat from locally raised animals and therefore may not be sold to the public.

The previous *Meat Inspection Regulations* were repealed in 2009, when a new *Public Health Act* came into force. These regulations provided very limited ability for individuals to sell meat and were repealed partly because there were no slaughter or meat processing facilities operating in the NWT. The lack of regulation is a regulatory barrier that prevents residents from developing meat production businesses.

The new *Meat Safety Regulations* will support the goals of the *NWT Agriculture Strategy*, *The Business of Food: A Food Production Plan 2017-2022*, and the priority of the 19th Legislative Assembly to increase food security through access to locally produced food. This will be accomplished by regulating private operations raising animals for meat production and sales. The regulations will allow for sales in a number of settings including farm gate, farmers' and community markets, food establishments, and sales through retail outlets. In addition to the new regulations there will also require updates to other regulations, including but not limited to, the Department of Lands, the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources, and the Department of Industry, Tourism, and Investment.

Overview of Legislation Governing Meat Across Canada

Meat inspection and production is regulated at both the federal and provincial/territorial level. The federal and provincial/territorial governments have set out separate inspection processes, but regulatory principles often overlap. The *Safe Food for Canadians Act* and the *Safe Food for Canadians Regulation* regulate the import, export, and interprovincial trade of meat products. Meat that is being transferred between provinces/territories must be processed and inspected in a federally registered establishment. All food sold in Canada must also meet several requirements under the *Food and Drugs Act* regardless of where the food is produced or sold. For example, the *Food and Drugs Act* prohibits the manufacture of food under unsanitary conditions, the sale of food that is harmful or unfit for human consumption, and the use of false or misleading advertising.

Creating *Meat Safety Regulations* in the NWT presents a unique challenge, given the small size and scale of meat producers compared to most jurisdictions in Canada. Most jurisdictions in Canada require meat to be inspected before and after slaughter for it to be sold to the public. Regulations in the NWT will need to allow for some flexibility for small producers to slaughter and distribute uninspected meat for sale direct to consumers and/or retailers within the NWT, while ensuring all necessary operational and safety standards are followed and that public health is protected.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

The public and stakeholder engagement was initiated on December 15, 2021, when the Discussion Paper: *Meat Safety Regulations in the NWT* (“Discussion Paper”) was posted on the website and remained open until February 17, 2022.

The goal of the engagement was to solicit feedback from the public and stakeholders on the development of Meat Safety Regulations. The Discussion Paper and accompanying Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) outlined the proposed provisions for the future Meat Safety Regulations. The proposed key elements consider the meat inspection regulations in other Canadian jurisdictions, while also considering the size and activities of meat producers in the NWT.

The public engagement focused on providing information to the public and collecting feedback on the development of regulations that would inform the development of Meat Safety Regulations in the NWT. The engagement consisted of three components:

1. Residents were invited to participate in the public engagement by reading the Discussion Paper posted on the Department’s website and submitting feedback by email, mail, or fax.
2. A letter was sent to key stakeholders inviting them to provide feedback on the Discussion Paper.
3. The Minister of Health and Social Services also sent letters to Members of the Legislative Assembly to invite them to participate by providing feedback on the Discussion Paper and encouraging them to share the Discussion Paper with their constituents.

Several communications approaches were taken to promote the public engagement throughout the two-month engagement period. The GNWT issued a public announcement inviting residents to provide their input to help inform the decisions respecting the development of Meat Safety Regulations. Daily radio advertisements were placed on the following radio stations from January 10 to February 17, 2022: 100.1 True North FM, CKLB, and Radio Taiga (French Radio station). Newspaper advertisements were placed in News North on January 17, 2022, and L'Aquilon (French newspaper) on January 21, 2022. Social media advertisements were placed on Facebook from January 10 to February 17, 2022.

This Report

This report provides a summary of the feedback received from the public and stakeholders. The views represented in this report reflect the priorities and concerns of engagement participants.

What We Heard

Topics covered in the Discussion Paper included:

- Overview of legislation governing meat across Canada;
- Exceptions to the Regulations;
- Application process;
- Meat inspection;
- Package labelling and record keeping for tracking and traceability;
- Operational standards;
- Offences and penalties; and
- Questions for consideration.

The questions asked in the Discussion Paper included:

Exceptions

1. Are there any other activities that the Meat Safety Regulations should apply to? If so, why?
2. Are there any activities that the Meat Safety Regulations should not apply to? If so, why?
3. Is the regulation of the proposed activities sufficient to protect the health and safety of the public? If not, what else should be considered?

Application Process

1. Are there any issues with the proposed permit structure?
2. Does the proposed permit structure create any barriers for small scale meat producers wanting to slaughter and sell their meat in the NWT? If yes, how?
3. Are the permit time frames reflective of the time frames slaughter would take place?

Meat Inspection

1. Would you consider buying meat that comes from a permitted individual, but that has not been inspected?

Package Labelling & Record Keeping – Tracking and Traceability

1. How should food establishments be required to inform their customers that food products contain uninspected meat?
2. Would you purchase food products that contain uninspected meat from a food establishment?
3. As a food establishment would you be interested in selling products containing uninspected meat to your customers? If not, why?

Operational Standards

1. Are there any other standards that operators should be required to follow?

Offences and Penalties

1. How much oversight should the Department have with respect to the sale of locally raised meat within the NWT?
2. Would these Regulations make it likely for you to purchase locally raised and slaughtered NWT meat?
3. Is there anything you feel is missing from these key elements?

The Responses:

- Total responses (written submissions): **12**
- Total responses (Facebook comments): **32**

Summaries of the responses are provided below and are broken down by method of response (i.e., online Facebook post, written submissions).

Written Submissions (12 submissions):

The Department received a variety of written submissions in response to the public and stakeholder engagement, including from industry to individual citizens. The origin and number of written submissions are:

- Industry – 1
- NWT Business Owners – 4
- Organizations – 1
- Individual Citizens – 4
- Indigenous Governments and Organizations - 2

In general, the majority of written submissions were in support of developing Meat Safety Regulations to facilitate the availability of locally raised animals in the NWT for meat or meat products and set standards and other requirements to ensure safe handling practices to protect public health. Some (three) individual citizens felt strongly that wild game should not be included in the regulations, which was consistent with the proposed scope as identified in the Discussion Paper and FAQs.

From Discussion Paper:

The Meat Safety Regulations will not apply to the harvesting or sale of wild fish, game species, or reindeer. Existing federal and territorial legislation and any agreements which oversee the harvesting and sale of wild game, reindeer and fish would still apply to those activities and products.

From FAQs:

The harvesting and slaughter of wild game will not be regulated under the Meat Safety Regulations. These activities are regulated under other legislation (e.g., NWT Wildlife Act).

The intention of these Regulations is to regulate the slaughter and handling of privately raised livestock in a pre-set location. The Regulations propose to allow for the handling of lawfully harvested and obtained, wild game in a meat premises provided certain conditions are met; specifically, that wild game is clean, the processed products are kept separate from other meat and are returned directly to the owner.

The Meat Safety Regulations will allow for privately raised livestock to be used for meat production and sales by removing legislative barriers that currently prevent residents from developing local meat production businesses. These regulations will also help advance the GNWT's priority to increase food security through locally produced meat using safe methods.

One individual submitted a letter urging that the Meat Safety Regulations include wild game arguing that it *'formally acknowledges the significance of wild game to Indigenous Peoples. It would begin to unwind the colonial discourses that have influenced the strict regulations of Indigenous*

Peoples and their foodways'. This submission encouraged and suggested that by including wild game in the upcoming meat regulations would present as an excellent opportunity to innovate and create a new standard for how Indigenous Peoples can take control of their food systems.

Another written submission from an individual indicated that meat production needs to be a regular inspected process, run by a certified meat cutter on staff. Another individual recommended that the NWT make their regulations compatible with Alberta as this would avoid red tape technicalities. This was echoed by another submission that argued the GNWT should *allow hunters to sell meat and country foods with low rules on Facebook or anywhere*. They also voiced concern over the lack of training and willing butchers in the NWT.

An NWT business owners' written submission was in support of the development of these regulations and shared their plans to add livestock to their future business strategies. An Indigenous Organization also indicated their support for these regulations, stating they feel the regulations are practical with the aim of supporting more local animals being raised for food. They would be willing to purchase uninspected meat as they feel the *'opportunity to buy locally where relationships of trust, and transparency of producers happens more easily is important'*.

The Department received a written submission from another NWT business owner that urged the GNWT to have as much oversight as possible with respect to the sale of locally raised meat within the NWT. By focusing on detecting food safety hazards, this NWT business owner states this will *'allow the industry to grow more organically'*. Inspections would then be seen as a way of helping operators do well as opposed to feeling they might not be allowed to even start their operation. They also highlighted the importance of reputation in this field and would be willing to purchase uninspected meat depending entirely on which farmer/meat operator the meat comes from. This submission emphasized that *'supporting those operators who are hoping to move things forward is more important than setting the tone to a strict regime'*.

A local organization expressed their contentment that the proposed regulations will facilitate the availability of locally produced meat and meat products from privately raised livestock to NWT consumers. They are hopeful meat and meat products will be available for sale through their organization. Going forward, they recommend that the NWT focus on developing a plain language 'how to' booklet and have a contact person available in each region to support prospective business ventures. To support local meat producers, this organization would be willing to offer tables for local meat producers to sell their meat.

Conclusion

This *What We Heard Report* provides a high-level summary of the input received throughout the public engagement period. It has been compiled to provide an understanding of the areas of support, concern, and other ideas raised by NWT residents and stakeholders respecting the development of Meat Safety Regulations in the NWT.

Notably, inspections of a meat premise or meat product cannot guarantee safety of the product; safe food production, slaughter, and handling practices help reduce the risk of unsafe food and or food

borne illnesses. Practices include training and adherence to standard public health practices by the premises operator to minimize the risk of food becoming contaminated.

Next Steps

The results of this public and stakeholder engagement, together with the results of the Department's preliminary scoping exercises, cross-jurisdictional reviews, and additional policy research will inform the development of Meat Safety Regulations. Before the Meat Safety Regulations come into force operational standards and procedures as well as training will be developed and provided. The Meat Safety Regulations are expected to come into force during the spring/summer of 2023. The public and stakeholders will be provided advance notice of the regulations and the come into force date.