

# Meat & Eggs

## 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

**Purpose:** To understand the unique opportunities and challenges that impact economically viable meat and egg production in New Hampshire, including agricultural production, slaughter, processing, and organic considerations.

### What's at Stake?

Animal agriculture plays an important dual role in New Hampshire; it creates health in our ecosystem by supporting nutrient cycling, biodiversity, soil health and carbon sequestration, and, at the same time, supports the health of our local economy. In contrast to large-scale industrial meat operations, New Hampshire's small and mid-scale meat and egg producers provide communities access to high-quality, locally-raised protein while creating an income stream that can fit into a diversified farm operation.

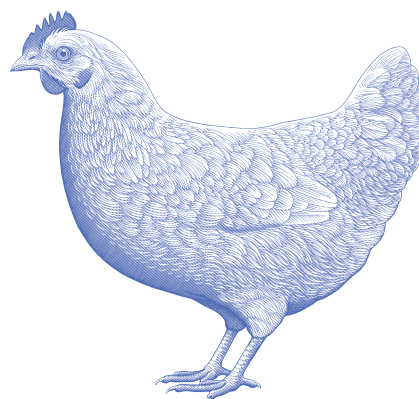
However, New Hampshire livestock farmers are challenged by several factors: limited in-state slaughter and processing capacity that matches the seasonality of animal production, dwindling access to essential services, scale-incompatible regulations, and a short production season. Our state's livestock farmers are further challenged to compete with conventional, large-scale meat and egg operations on price while facing disproportionate costs of production. There is strong consumer demand for local meat and eggs; the charge is to support New Hampshire farmers in meeting that demand.

### Current Conditions: Livestock & Poultry Farming

A growing local food movement in New Hampshire has led to increased demand for local meat and eggs. However, farmers are struggling to meet this demand and access markets due to a combination of challenges. The decline of pastureland in the state and overall unaffordability of land, combined with the high costs of small-scale agriculture, deter new livestock farmers and inhibit the growth of the sector. New Hampshire livestock farmers are further challenged to compete on price with conventional, large-scale meat and egg operations.

In the state, over 21% of farms raise chickens, 11% raise cattle, 10% raise sheep or goats, and 7% raise hogs. The current regulations in New Hampshire are intended for farms that are larger than the vast majority of those in the state. This forces small to mid-sized farms to navigate complex loopholes and exemptions in order to operate. In addition, the continued loss of dairy farms in New Hampshire is exacerbating the lack of veterinary care, which also reduces a farmer's access to essential services like emergency veterinarian care.

Tension between animal rights activists and livestock farmers is an increasing challenge with no simple solution: at the minimum, clear systems to handle complaints and concerns are needed.



# Challenges and Opportunities: Livestock & Poultry Farming

## CHALLENGES

- Agricultural land in New Hampshire is increasingly expensive. In 2024, land was valued at \$6,250 per acre, which is significantly higher than the national average and the average value in Vermont and Maine.
- There is a critical gap in support for mid-sized (3,000-10,000) laying hen operations. Operations with up to 3,000 laying hens have a relatively low administrative burden. If farming 3,000 laying hens or more, an operation must be licensed and inspected by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). For many operations, this is not financially or administratively feasible under 10,000 laying hens. This dichotomy has become a huge barrier to incremental expansion for New Hampshire’s laying hen operations.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Agricultural easements are an opportunity to conserve farmland and protect it from development. For farmers struggling financially, this should be explored in tandem with farm planning and general farm business technical assistance.
- There is untapped demand for large animal veterinarians that can be capitalized on with creative solutions, like supporting New England-wide veterinarian practices and incubating emerging new businesses.
- Consumer education and promotion of local animal products can increase farm viability in New Hampshire. Campaigns like NH Eats Local Month could partner with the NH Farm Bureau and the NH Beef Producers Association to increase promotion of local animal products.

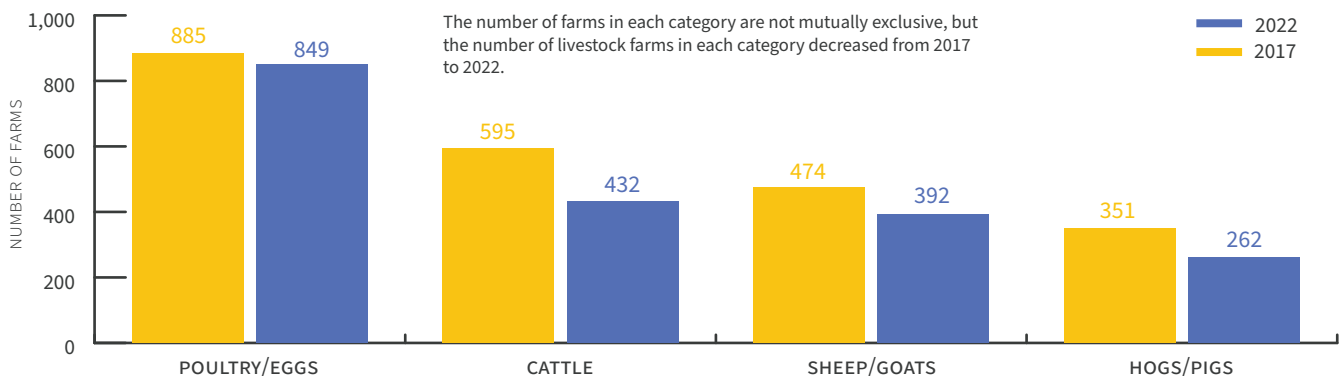
## Current Conditions: Slaughter & Processing

New Hampshire has hundreds of small livestock producers, but a very small number of slaughter and processing facilities, resulting in severe constraints on the ability of farmers to meet demand for locally-raised animal products. Additionally, slaughter facilities face challenges running sustainably due to an inconsistent labor force.

Currently, there are only four USDA-certified slaughter facilities in New Hampshire. While larger farms can space out the slaughter of their animals throughout

the year, smaller farms tend to prefer their animals to be butchered in the fall, putting a bottleneck in the slaughtering process in the fall and early winter months. At this time, none of New Hampshire’s USDA facilities process poultry and each facility differs in terms of which animals they will process. Slaughter and processing regulations are hard to understand and follow, causing widespread confusion among producers. 29 states have a statewide meat inspection program, including Maine and Vermont, while New Hampshire does not.

**NUMBER OF NEW HAMPSHIRE LIVESTOCK FARMS, 2017-2022**



SOURCE: USDA 2017 and 2022 Censuses of Agriculture.

# Challenges and Opportunities: Slaughter & Processing

## CHALLENGES

- USDA-certified slaughter and processing capacity is very low, especially in the fall. In order to be sold in retail locations, animals are required to be slaughtered and processed in USDA-certified facilities.
- There is confusion about poultry regulations, especially how state statute RSA 143-A:14-153 compares to the USDA poultry exemption rules, leading to widespread confusion.
- New Hampshire's slaughter and processing skilled labor force is in jeopardy; facilities face labor shortages, while Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs have been cut from schools, leading to graduates with no experience or relevant skills in the industry.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- The other option for slaughter and processing in New Hampshire, outside of a USDA-certified slaughter facility, is through a custom meat slaughter and processing facility. Also known as "custom exempt," processing in this way permits farmers to sell quarter, half, or whole animals, but only within New Hampshire and only in a direct-to-consumer market. "Custom exempt" is intriguing to many farmers, but offers limited sales options and is prohibitive due to the cost of infrastructure and equipment investments.
- There has been significant investment in meat processing infrastructure in recent years, including the creation of a poultry and rabbit food safety certification course through the University of New Hampshire and \$750,000 in funding awarded to meat processing infrastructure related projects in 2023.

## Summary

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Major changes are needed to support New Hampshire's livestock farmers and bring affordable, locally-raised animal products into local markets. There are many farmers ready to expand, but they are limited by a lack of infrastructure for slaughter and processing in New Hampshire and additionally burdened by regulations designed for large farms. In addition, intentional changes within New Hampshire's schools must occur to build a future workforce that has the skill and experience to bring the slaughter and processing industry forward; infrastructure can be built, but without the labor to do the work nothing can be gained.

## Recommendations

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- **Expand capacity for meat slaughter and processing.** Expanding capacity for meat slaughter and processing can be achieved in one or more of the following ways:
  - Invest in the construction of a USDA-certified slaughter facility in New Hampshire that would include the slaughter and processing of multiple animals.
  - Invest in the construction of a USDA-certified value-added processing facility in New Hampshire to process value-added meat products, such as meatballs, sausages, and jerky.
  - Fund a state inspection program, mirroring Maine's and Vermont's, and develop it with reciprocity between state programs to accommodate cross-state sales.

- Explore the feasibility of developing a USDA approved hybrid meat inspection program with the NH Department of Health and Human Service (NHDHHS) and the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food (NHDAMF). NHDHHS already inspects processing facilities, which allows meat to be sold at the farm, at farmers' markets, and to restaurants. NHDAMF could inspect the "kill floor," while the actual kill inspection could be done by a third party, such as a veterinarian.
- **Partner with Vermont to minimize fall slaughter bottleneck.** In tandem with Vermont, convene the owners of existing cross-state slaughter facilities and explore ideas to minimize the fall bottleneck and create a more consistent workflow, such as the development of an incentive program for off-peak slaughter.
- **Conduct an assessment of federal and state poultry regulations, requirements, and exemptions for New Hampshire producers.** This assessment will produce the end goal of identifying and clarifying points of confusion and offering guidance on needed legislative changes, educational materials, or producer trainings.
- **Launch a state-run Large Animal Veterinarian Bridge Program.** The program will address gaps and demonstrate demand for a large animal veterinarian practice in New Hampshire. The program could host a veterinarian monthly and pay for their travel. Farmers could schedule appointments during that month, allowing them to build a relationship with a veterinarian, which is required for prescription drugs and certain feeds.
- **Conduct a feasibility study to license midsized laying hen operations.** Conduct a feasibility study for a state-run program to license midsized laying hen operations with 3,000 to 10,000 laying hens. The program would allow farmers to sell in direct-to-consumer and restaurant markets and provide an exemption from the USDA and FDA licensing during the incremental growth phase.

## Authors

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**New Hampshire**  
*Department of Agriculture,  
 Markets, and Food*



This brief was developed through a participatory process led by the NH Food Alliance, a program of the University of New Hampshire. The brief content is comprised of the opinions, perspectives, and information gathered by the authors and participants, and does not necessarily represent those of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or the NH Food Alliance.

For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on [nhfoodalliance.org](https://nhfoodalliance.org) or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.