

Private Kill Handbook for Scottish Farmers

A Step-by-Step Guide for Beef, Sheep, and Pig Farmers in Scotland.

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1. Introduction

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For many Scottish farmers, producing high-quality meat from their own livestock is more than a business — it's a source of pride. Whether you're looking to feed your family with home-reared meat or build a direct-to-consumer enterprise, arranging a **private kill** allows you to retain full control over animal welfare, processing, and quality.

This handbook is designed to support **beef, sheep, and pig farmers** in Scotland through the entire private kill process. It provides clear, step-by-step guidance — from raising healthy animals and preparing for slaughter, to selecting butchery options and selling the final product. It also explains the **legal and regulatory responsibilities** involved, including documentation, transport, hygiene, labelling, and record-keeping.

With practical checklists and up-to-date requirements, this guide ensures you can navigate the process confidently, whether you're processing for **personal use** or **commercial sale**. By following these steps, you can maximise the value of your livestock while maintaining full compliance with Scottish food safety and animal welfare standards.

Let this handbook be your practical companion from field to freezer — or market stall.

2. Considerations

A livestock farmer in Scotland considering whether to process and market their own homegrown meat or sell to the livestock market must evaluate several key factors. Here's a detailed breakdown of the **considerations** under relevant categories:

Financial Considerations

- **Initial Investment:** Costs for slaughter, processing, cold storage, packaging, branding, and marketing.
 - **Profit Margin:** Direct marketing can offer higher margins, but involves higher overheads; selling live cattle provides immediate but lower returns.
 - **Cash Flow Timing:** Livestock sales provide quicker payment; direct sales often involve delayed returns.
 - **Economies of Scale:** Smaller operations may struggle to achieve cost-efficiency in processing and marketing.
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Infrastructure and Logistics

- **Abattoir Access:** Proximity and availability of local slaughterhouses.
 - **Cold Storage and Transport:** Adequate refrigerated transport and storage facilities.
 - **Butchery and Packaging:** Whether to outsource or develop in-house capabilities.
 - **Distribution Channels:** Farm shop, farmers' markets, local retailers, online sales, or direct delivery.
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Legal and Regulatory Requirements

- **Food Safety and Hygiene:** Compliance with Food Standards Scotland (FSS) regulations.
 - **Traceability and Labelling:** Meeting standards for provenance and meat labelling (Scotch Beef PGI standards).
 - **Licensing and Certification:** Food business registration, health inspections, and possibly SALSA or QMS approval.
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Time and Labour

- **Labour Intensity:** Direct marketing demands significant time for processing, marketing, selling, and customer service.
 - **Skill Requirements:** Knowledge of meat processing, retail, customer relations, and possibly e-commerce.
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Market Demand and Branding

- **Consumer Demand:** Interest in local, traceable, grass-fed beef can be strong, especially in urban areas.
 - **Brand Identity:** Ability to develop a strong, trustworthy brand around quality, welfare, and local produce.
 - **Pricing Strategy:** Competitive pricing that reflects premium quality without alienating customers.
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Risk Management

- **Market Risk:** Fluctuating consumer demand, seasonal sales variation, and local competition.
 - **Product Risk:** Losses from spoilage, processing errors, or inability to sell perishable products quickly.
 - **Business Diversification:** Direct sales can diversify income but also spread risk into unfamiliar areas.
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Personal Goals and Lifestyle

- **Lifestyle Preference:** Whether the farmer enjoys direct customer interaction or prefers production-focused farming.
 - **Succession and Family Involvement:** Involving younger generations in value-added enterprises may support farm succession.
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Community and Environmental Impact

- **Supporting Local Economy:** Selling locally processed beef may contribute to rural economies.
 - **Sustainability Goals:** Direct marketing can help highlight sustainable, low-carbon practices and enhance public image.
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Summary: Pros & Cons

Option	Pros	Cons
Sell to Livestock Market	Simple, quick payment, low risk	Lower margins, price volatility, little control
Process & Market Meat	Higher margins, brand control, local impact	Complex, costly, labour-intensive, regulatory burden

3. Raising Healthy Livestock

Best Practices for Animal Welfare, Growth, and Meat Quality

PIGS

- **Breed Selection:** Choose fast-growing, hardy breeds suited to Scottish climate (e.g., Large White, Landrace, or traditional Tamworth for outdoor systems).
 - **Housing & Welfare:** Provide well-ventilated, dry housing. Outdoor systems require shelter and good fencing. Maintain hygiene to prevent disease.
 - **Feeding:** Balanced commercial feed with 16–18% protein for growing pigs. Fresh water must be available at all times.
 - **Health Management:** Routine worming and vaccinations. Monitor for signs of respiratory or digestive issues.
 - **Ideal Slaughter Weight:**
 - **70–90 kg liveweight**
 - Optimal fat coverage with good muscle depth.
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SHEEP

- **Breed Selection:** Choose resilient breeds like Texel, Suffolk, or Scottish Blackface depending on terrain and market goals.
 - **Pasture Management:** Rotational grazing and parasite control (e.g., faecal egg counts, clean grazing).
 - **Feeding:** Good quality grass and supplementary concentrates in final 4–6 weeks before finishing. Adequate trace minerals.
 - **Health Management:** Footrot prevention, regular worming/fluke treatment, vaccination for clostridial diseases.
 - **Ideal Slaughter Weight:**
 - **40–45 kg liveweight** (carcass ~18–21 kg)
 - Condition Score 3–3.5: good muscle tone, moderate backfat, firm finish.
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CATTLE

- **Breed Selection:** Continental (e.g., Limousin, Charolais) or native breeds (e.g., Aberdeen Angus) for quality beef and adaptability.
 - **Housing & Welfare:** Well-bedded sheds in winter; access to clean water, good ventilation, and handling facilities essential.
 - **Feeding:** Grass-fed with silage or hay in winter. Finishing cattle often require concentrates for 90–120 days. Monitor for acidosis and bloat.
 - **Health Management:** Vaccinate against pneumonia and clostridial diseases. Regular worm control. Trace elements supplementation where needed.
 - **Ideal Slaughter Weight:**
 - **550–700 kg liveweight**
 - Target fat class 3–4L and conformation class R or better under EUROP grid.
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GENERAL GOOD PRACTICE

- **Record Keeping:** Maintain accurate movement, treatment, and feed records.
 - **Biosecurity:** Quarantine new stock, disinfect equipment, limit visitor access.
 - **Transport & Slaughter:** Ensure stress-free loading, certified hauliers, and humane handling at abattoirs.
 - **Regulatory Compliance:** Adhere to Food Standards Scotland and APHA guidelines, and consider assurance schemes (e.g. QMS, Red Tractor).
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Healthy, well-managed animals not only ensure higher welfare and sustainability but also produce better-quality, traceable meat for the Scottish and wider UK market.

4. Preparing Animals for Slaughter & Documentation Requirements

Contact the abattoir in advance to book your livestock in, confirm drop-off procedures and ensure all paperwork is in order to avoid delays.

Before sending livestock to an abattoir in Scotland, it's essential to prepare both the **animals** and **paperwork** to ensure legal compliance, animal welfare, and meat traceability.

Animal Preparation

- **Withhold feed** for 12–18 hours before transport to reduce gut content, but **provide access to water** up to the point of loading.
- **Handle calmly** and use appropriate loading facilities to minimise stress and injury.
- **Health check** animals before travel – they must be fit for transport: no lameness, late-stage pregnancy, or illness.
- **Clean animals** are preferred; excessively dirty stock may be refused or delayed at slaughter.
- **Ear tags/microchips**: Cattle must have two ear tags with the same number. Sheep and pigs must be identified per species regulations.

Required Documentation

1. **Food Chain Information (FCI) Form**
 - Required for **all species**. Declares medicines, disease history, and withdrawal periods.
 - Must be completed accurately and sent with animals.
 2. **Movement Documents**
 - **Cattle**: Use a **Cattle Tracing System (CTS)** movement via *ScotEID* or *BCMS*. Include the passport for each animal.
 - **Sheep/Pigs**: Use a **ScotEID movement document** (electronic or paper) with full identification and holding details.
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5. Livestock Transport Requirements

Transporting livestock to an abattoir in Scotland must meet strict **animal welfare**, **legal**, and **biosecurity standards**. Below is a summary of key requirements:

Fitness for Transport

- Animals must be **fit to travel**: no severe lameness, illness, injury, or late-stage pregnancy.
- Animals must be **clean and dry**, especially for slaughter.
- Young animals must be of **minimum age** (e.g. calves over 10 days, lambs with a healed navel).

Vehicle and Journey Requirements

- Vehicles must be **suitable**: non-slip floors, secure partitions, adequate ventilation, and appropriate for species.
- Clean and **disinfect** the vehicle before and after use.
- For **journeys over 65 km**, transporters need:
 - A valid **Transporter Authorisation** (Type 1: up to 8 hours; Type 2: over 8 hours).
 - A **Certificate of Competence** for drivers and handlers.
 - Contingency plan for emergencies or delays.

Journey Duration & Welfare

- Slaughter journeys in Scotland are typically short (<8 hours), so rest, feeding, and watering in transit is not required — but **water must be available before loading**.
- **Avoid mixing unfamiliar animals** to reduce stress and fighting.
- Ensure **gentle loading and unloading**, using ramps with side guards and no excessive force or electric goads.

Documentation

- Carry all required documents:
 - **Animal movement document** (via *ScotEID*).
 - **Food Chain Information (FCI)** form.
 - **Cattle passports** for bovines.
- Have copies of **transporter authorisation and certificates** ready for inspection.

Enforcement & Penalties

- Transport is regulated by **APHA** (Animal and Plant Health Agency) and **Scottish Government** under EU and UK law.
- Non-compliance may lead to **fines**, **animal welfare investigations**, or being **refused entry at abattoirs**.

6. Arrival at the Abattoir

Advance Booking

- Most abattoirs **require an appointment** for private kills.
 - You'll need to provide:
 - Number and type of animals
 - Holding number (CPH)
 - Purpose (private kill)
 - Whether the carcass is for **personal use** or **retail sale** (which may require licensing)
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Arrival and Check-In

- **Report to the lairage office** or reception and present:
 - **Animal movement documents** (ScotEID/BCMS)
 - **Food Chain Information (FCI)** form
 - **Cattle passports** (if applicable)
 - The abattoir will **check documents and IDs** (ear tags).
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Unloading Animals

- Unload in designated area under supervision.
 - Animals are checked for:
 - **Fitness for slaughter**
 - **Cleanliness** (dirty livestock may be delayed or rejected)
 - Staff guide animals into holding pens (lairage).
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Lairage & Pre-Slaughter Inspection

- Animals are held temporarily to rest.
 - **Official Veterinarian (OV)** inspects the animals **ante-mortem** for signs of disease or distress.
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Slaughter and Processing

- Animals are humanely slaughtered following **Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (WATOK)** regulations.
 - Carcasses are inspected **post-mortem** for health and safety.
 - You can usually request:
 - Specific butchery instructions (jointing, mince, sausages)
 - Vacuum packing and labelling (especially for retail use)
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Collection or Delivery of Meat

- Meat is **chilled and hung** (typically for 7–21 days for beef).
- You are contacted when it's ready for **collection** or delivery.

- All meat is **labelled and traceable** — if selling, it must meet **hygiene and traceability regulations**.

Retailing the meat (e.g. at markets or shops) requires you to be a **registered food business** with your local authority. **You must keep records** of the animal's ID, slaughter date, and meat batch for traceability.

7. Butchery Options

When arranging a private kill, farmers have three main options for butchery, each with different levels of involvement and regulation.

Option A is to use the **abattoir's in-house butchery service**, which is convenient and often offers standard cuts, packaging, and optional extras like sausages or burgers.

Option B involves working with a **licensed external butcher**, allowing for more customised processing and potentially better branding, provided the meat is transferred under hygienic conditions.

Option C is to **set up an on-farm butchery**, which offers the greatest control and direct-to-consumer potential, but requires **registration with the local authority**, a full **HACCP plan**, and compliance with food hygiene regulations.

BEEF

- Typical Carcass Weight: 280–380 kg
- Hanging Time: 14–21 days (for tenderness and flavour)

Common Butchery Options:

- Standard Cuts: Sirloin, ribeye, rump, brisket, mince, stewing steak, silverside, topside, shin, oxtail
- Optional Add-ons:
 - Burgers or sausages
 - Bone-in vs. boneless joints
 - Vacuum packing and labelling for freezing or retail
- One animal can yield 180–220 kg of usable meat.
- Request packaging in household or retail-sized portions.

LAMB / MUTTON

- Typical Carcass Weight: 18–22 kg (lamb), 25–35 kg (mutton)
- Hanging Time: 5–10 days

Common Butchery Options:

- Standard Cuts: Leg, shoulder, chops, breast, loin, mince, shanks
- Optional Add-ons:
 - Whole carcass (halved or quartered)
 - Bone-in vs. boneless roasts
 - Sausages or burgers (for hogget/mutton)
- A lamb yields approx. 12–15 kg of butchered meat.
- Clear cutting instructions help reduce waste.

PORK

- Typical Carcass Weight: 55–80 kg
- Hanging Time: 1–3 days (shorter due to fat content)

Common Butchery Options:

- Standard Cuts: Chops, shoulder, belly, leg (roasting or cured), ribs, sausages
- Optional Add-ons:
 - Bacon (dry or wet cure)
 - Gammon and hams
 - Mince or sausage meat (with seasoning choice)
- One pig yields 50–65 kg of meat depending on trim.
- Specify fat content for sausages and mince.

CHOOSING A BUTCHER

Work with an FSS-approved butcher and provide clear written instructions. Ask about:

- Cost per animal or per kg
- Vacuum packing & shelf life
- Labelling (for personal use or retail)

STORAGE & SALES

- Meat should be kept at **0–5°C** or **frozen quickly**.
- If selling, meat must be processed and labelled under **approved food hygiene regulations**.
- Always keep records for **traceability**.

Good butchery maximises meat value, reduces waste, and enhances eating quality — make sure your butcher understands your end goal!

8. Selling or Consuming the Meat

After slaughter and butchery, meat from your livestock can be used for personal consumption or sold directly to others. The rules vary depending on the intended use, and it's vital to follow the correct procedures for hygiene, traceability, and legality.

PERSONAL CONSUMPTION

- You do not need a licence or registration to consume your own meat.
- Meat must come from a licensed abattoir and be slaughtered and butchered legally.
- Keep it properly stored (0–5°C or frozen) and ensure packaging is safe for food use.
- You may share with immediate family or household without formal approval, but cannot sell it.

DIRECT SALE TO CONSUMERS

If you plan to sell meat (e.g. to friends, neighbours, farmers markets, or online), you must:

1. Register as a Food Business
 - Contact your local council's Environmental Health department.
 - Registration is free but required before you start trading.
2. Ensure Labelling Meets Legal Standards
 - Labels must include:
 - Product name
 - Storage and use-by dates
 - Weight
 - Batch or traceability code
 - Producer name and address
 - Safe cooking instructions (recommended)
3. Maintain Hygiene & Traceability Records
 - Keep cleaning logs, temperature records, and supplier details.
 - Comply with basic food hygiene training and good practice.

PROCESSED PRODUCTS (e.g. Sausages, Burgers, Bacon)

- These are classed as higher-risk foods, and require:
 - A documented HACCP plan (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points)
 - Possible approval from Environmental Health (not just registration)
 - Clear ingredient labelling, including allergens (e.g. gluten, sulphites)
- Consider working with a licensed processor or butcher if you're not set up for processing on-farm.

REMEMBER:

- Meat must not be sold if processed outside of approved or registered premises.
- All sales are subject to inspection by local authorities.

Following the correct procedures protects public health, supports your reputation, and ensures full compliance with Scottish food law.

9. Record Keeping & Compliance

When selling meat from your own livestock, keeping accurate records and meeting legal standards is essential. It ensures traceability, food safety, and compliance with local authority inspections. Below is a summary of what you must do to stay compliant.

Essential Records to Maintain

1. Animal Identification & Movement Records

- Record all **ear tag numbers**, **dates of birth**, and **movements to/from holdings** using ScotEID or CTS.
- Keep a copy of **Food Chain Information (FCI)** for each animal slaughtered.

2. Slaughter & Butchery Documentation

- Retain **abattoir kill sheets**, carcass weights, and confirmation of inspection.
- Note any **cutting instructions** or batch codes from your butcher.

3. Sales Records

- Track **quantities sold**, **dates**, **buyer details** (if applicable), and **product types**.
- Useful for financial records and essential for traceability in a recall.

Hygiene & Storage Compliance

1. Cleaning Schedules

- Maintain a **written schedule** showing when and how all surfaces, tools, and fridges/freezers are cleaned.
- Use food-safe disinfectants and record the cleaning method and frequency.

2. Temperature Logs

- Monitor and record fridge and freezer temperatures **at least once daily**.
- Fridges must stay between **0–5°C**, and freezers at **-18°C or lower**.
- Keep logs for at least **6 months**, or longer if your local authority advises.

HACCP Plan (If Selling Meat)

If you sell any meat — fresh or processed — you must implement a **basic HACCP plan (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points)** to manage food safety risks.

Your HACCP should:

- Identify key risks (e.g. temperature, cross-contamination)
- Define controls (e.g. cleaning, chilling)
- Include corrective actions (e.g. discard if fridge exceeds 8°C)
- Be written down and **available for inspection**

Free templates are available from the **Food Standards Scotland** website.

Stay Inspection-Ready

- Your Environmental Health Officer may inspect your premises, records, and hygiene practices.
 - Keep your paperwork **well-organised and up to date**.
 - Registration as a food business is **mandatory if selling**.
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Keeping thorough records not only protects your customers — it protects your business.

10. Conclusion

Choosing to process and sell your own homegrown meat is a rewarding way to take full ownership of your product — from rearing to retail. Whether your goal is to feed your family with high-welfare, traceable meat or to build a brand based on local, farm-to-table values, the private kill route puts quality, transparency, and control in your hands.

This handbook has walked you through every stage of the process — from animal health and preparation to abattoir logistics, butchery decisions, legal compliance, and direct sales. While it does require careful planning and adherence to regulation, private kill can add real value to your enterprise and strengthen your connection with consumers.

As the demand for local, sustainable meat grows, Scottish farmers are uniquely placed to meet it. By staying informed, keeping good records, and working with trusted professionals, you can ensure your private kill journey is both **legally sound** and **financially rewarding**.

For further guidance, always consult with your **local authority Environmental Health Officer, Food Standards Scotland**, or relevant **farming organisations**.

Good luck — and here's to producing great Scottish meat, the right way.