



DEC News Release

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
410 Willoughby St., Juneau, AK 99801-1795
Phone: (907) 465-5066 Fax: (907) 465-5070
www.state.ak.us/dec/

Contact: Kimberly Stryker at Kimberly_stryker@dec.state.ak.us or 907-269-7628

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEC Creates Reindeer Meat Processing Inspection Program

August 18, 2003—The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has created a voluntary reindeer slaughtering and processing inspection program that will boost Alaska's reindeer industry. The regulations go into effect on September 6, 2003.

“The reindeer industry is one of the state's underutilized resources,” said Kristin Ryan, director of DEC's division of environmental health.

Currently, to be processed and sold nationwide, reindeer meat must come from USDA inspected slaughtering and processing plants. DEC's regulations, closely modeled after USDA standards, provide for state-run inspections that afford operators and processors easier access to state inspectors, and opportunities to reach a broader market. Without inspection, reindeer meat cannot be sold to restaurants and other national distributors, and may only be distributed locally under certain circumstances (18 AAC 31.820). Inspected reindeer meat also commands a higher market price.

“The new regulations open up options to buy locally,” said Doug Drum of Indian Valley Meats, who sells reindeer sausage. “We have no problem selling our reindeer sausage and would welcome more reindeer meat from local suppliers.”

Reindeer herding is a traditional part of Alaska Native culture and plays an important economic role in rural Alaska. The inspection program supports Alaska's unique rural industry by allowing for flexibility and lower costs to processors who must have plant inspections to sell their product. “The reindeer industry is a diamond in the rough and we're doing what we can to encourage its cultivation,” Ryan said.

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For more information about reindeer herding in Alaska, visit the University of Alaska Fairbanks Reindeer Research Program's website at <http://reindeer.salrm.uaf.edu/>.