

## **General Guidelines for Alligator Meat Processing**

Any person or firm that prepares or processes alligator meat to be sold for human consumption either retail or wholesale, must comply with the Georgia Food Act, Georgia Wholesale Fish Dealers Law, and requirements in the Georgia Department of Agriculture Food Division Regulations (Chapter 40-7-1, and 40-15-3). In addition, any processor of alligator meat must also meet Federal requirements in 21 CFR Part 123 for Fish and Fishery Products. A summary of some of these requirements as they directly relate to processing alligator meat is as follows:

1. All licensed Agent-Trappers that sell or transfer alligator meat as provided for in Title 27 Chapter 391-4-13 must purchase a Georgia Wholesale Fish Dealers License from the Georgia Department of Agriculture, provided that no permit shall be required for prepared alligator meat sold for food by restaurants.
2. All persons, firms, Agent-Trappers that process, skin, or butcher alligator for wholesale alligator meat sales to restaurants, grocery stores, or seafood markets must purchase a Georgia Wholesale Fish Dealer License from the Georgia Department of Agriculture and, in addition, must also obtain a license to operate as a Food Sales Establishment to process alligator meat.
3. All persons, firms, agent-trappers that process, skin, or butcher alligator meat for retail sales to customers only, must obtain a license to operate as a Food Sales Establishment to process alligator meat.

Both the Georgia Wholesale Fish Dealer License and the Food Sales Establishment License can be obtained through the Consumer Protection Division of the Georgia Department of Agriculture, 19 MLK Jr. Dr., Room 311, Atlanta, Georgia 30334. The annual fee for the Georgia Wholesale Fish Dealer License is \$50.00 and there is no fee or charge for the Food Sales Establishment License. The processor must be in compliance with the Department's Food Division regulations to obtain the Food Sales Establishment License. For a written hard copy of the regulations and requirements to process alligator meat (40-7-1) contact the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Seafood Safety Office, 701 Hwy. 80 West, Savannah, Georgia 31408 or call 912-963-2500 or 404-656-3621. In addition to complying with these state food division regulations, operators that process alligator meat for wholesale, must also meet the new Federal Seafood HACCP Regulation Title 21 CFR Part 123 for Fish and Fishery Products.

The following are recommended guidelines for Alligator processing:

1. Handling alligators prior to skinning and butcher step.
  - A. Alligators must be placed under mechanical refrigeration at an air

- temperature of 40 F. or less, within a maximum of four (4) hours from time of death.
- B. Alligators must be dressed in an approved processing facility meeting the requirements of the Georgia Department of Agriculture Food Division Regulations, Chapter 40-7-1.
  - C. The alligator must be thoroughly washed and rinsed prior to skinning. An approved sanitizing solution at the proper strength should be applied to the hide after washing and rinsing.
  - D. Skinning and butchering should be completed within 24 hours of time of death.
2. Plans for new construction of processing facilities should be submitted to the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Consumer Protection Division for review before construction begins.
  3. The construction requirements and maintenance of facilities for processing alligator meat are described in Chapter 40-7-1-.63 thru 40-7-1-.67.
    - A. The floors, floor coverings, walls, wall coverings, and ceilings shall be designed, constructed, and installed so they are smooth and easily cleanable.
    - B. Floor and wall junctures shall be coved and enclosed or sealed.
    - C. Floors in processing areas and refrigerated coolers shall be provided with drains and graded to drain adequately.
  4. Facilities shall be designed and constructed to exclude pests and insects.
  5. A hand washing lavatory shall be equipped to provide water at a temperature of at least 110° F. through a mixing valve or combination faucet.
    - A. Hand washing stations shall be supplied with hand soap, a supply of sanitary towels, and a waste receptacle.
    - B. Employees engaged in processing shall comply with sections 40-7-1-.05 and 40-7-1-.06.
  6. A three-compartment ware-washing sink shall be provided for washing, rinsing and sanitizing utensils and equipment.
    - A. Ware washing sinks and other equipment (processing tables) used in the processing of alligator meat shall be constructed, maintained, located, installed, stored, cleaned and sanitized as described in sections 40-7-1-.33 thru 40-7-1-.51.
  7. A potable water supply shall be provided from public or private water systems that meet water quality standards and are delivered through a plumbing system installed and maintained in good repair and according to code. Toilet rooms should be accessible to plant employees. These requirements are described in 40-7-1-.53 thru 40-7-1-.60.
    - A. A hose providing potable water supplied with an adequate backflow prevention device is recommended for cleaning stationary equipment, food contact, and non-food contact surfaces. The hose should be supplied with a spray nozzle adequate to loosen soiled surfaces and be stored properly when not in use.

8. Sewage, liquid waste, garbage, and refuse shall be disposed of properly through a public sewerage system or a private septic system approved by the Department and according to requirements described in section 40-7-1-.61 thru 40-7-1-.63.
9. Processing and handling of alligator meat during butcher, boning, and packaging.
  - A. Care should be taken to remove any bullet fragments that may have lodged in edible meats. Hand held metal detection devices are recommended, but not required when the meat is carefully inspected.
  - B. The butchering and boning operation should be conducted as quickly as possible once the alligator has been removed from mechanical refrigeration in order to minimize the growth of pathogenic organisms.
  - C. Dressed alligator meats may be sold fresh or frozen when properly labeled, but must be maintained at proper temperature during processing and display as described in 40-7-1-.20 and during transport as described in 40-7-1-.09.
  - D. Dressed alligator meats offered for sale shall be packaged and labeled in accordance with the Department of Natural resources Game and Fish Division regulations (Chapter 391-4-13).
10. Dressed alligator meats shall also comply with the Georgia Department of Agriculture laws and regulations applicable to packaging and labeling of food products described in 40-7-1-.25 thru 40-7-1-.26 and also in 40-15-3.
  - A. Prior to the manufacture of alligator meats, all packaged product labels are subject to review by the department as administrative procedures enjoin.
  - B. A product code (lot number) is required as described in 40-7-1-.26 (1) (c).
11. The Federal Seafood HACCP Regulation Title 21 CFR Part 123 Fish and Fishery Products will apply to all alligator processing facilities when the product is intended for wholesale to restaurants, grocery stores, or seafood markets. A written hard copy of the Federal Seafood Regulation may also be obtained from the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Consumer Protection Division.
  - A. The hazards for wild alligator processing generally include chemical environmental contaminants from the harvest area and bullet fragments.
  - B. The hazards for farm-raised alligator generally include aquaculture drugs used in feed and bullet fragments or metal inclusion.
  - C. Other hazards may exist depending on processing methods and/or grow-out methods and production.

Questions pertaining to processing of alligator meat, HACCP requirements, facility standards and requirements, and required licenses may be addressed to

the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Consumer Protection Division, Atlanta office at 404-656-3621 or the Seafood Safety Office, Savannah, Ga. at 912-963-2500.

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