



NORTHWEST MEAT PROCESSORS ASSOCIATION (NWMPA)
**JOURNEYMAN MEAT CUTTER
APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM**

PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Authorized States: Washington • Oregon • Idaho • Utah

*O*NET-SOC Code 51-3021.00 (All-Round Butcher / MEAT CUTTER)*

Registered with the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship

29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 29

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CHAPTER —

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is the governing program document for the Northwest Meat Processors Association (NWMPA) Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program. It covers program structure, training requirements, competency standards, wage progression, and all other requirements that govern participation. It defines the rights, responsibilities, and requirements of every person who participates in the program — the apprentice, the Training Agent, and the program sponsor. Read it before the program begins. Keep it on hand throughout.

The handbook is organized into fourteen chapters. Some chapters are written primarily for apprentices. Some are written primarily for Training Agents. Most apply to both. Where a chapter or section is directed at a specific audience, it is identified clearly at the top of that section.

The Three-Document Training System

This handbook governs the program. It does not replace the three working documents that each apprentice and Training Agent uses section by section. Those documents are:

Document	Who Uses It	What It Contains
Document 1 — Apprentice Curriculum	Apprentice	All instructional content, worked examples, learning checkpoints, and required reading assignments for each section. Given to the apprentice at the start of each section.
Document 2 — Training Agent Manual	Training Agent only	Facilitation guide, Section Readiness Checklist, Topic Completion Tracker, condensed glossary, and Quick Reference Card. The Training Agent's working document for each section.
Document 3 — Assessment & Administration Package	Training Agent only — SECURED	On-the-Job Training (OJT) Competency Verification form, Food Safety Field Worksheet, Written Examination, and Answer Key. Kept secured at all times. Never accessible to the apprentice before examination.

Important

The Apprentice Curriculum, Training Agent Manual, and Assessment Package are proprietary documents owned by Tracy Smaczarz and licensed to NWMPA. They are not part of this handbook and are distributed separately through the program's document delivery system.

A Note on This Program's Purpose

This program was built to develop competent, productive, profitable journey-level meat cutters for the small-plant and independent butcher shop industry. Every requirement in this handbook — every hour, every competency standard, every assessment threshold — exists in service of that purpose. Read the requirements in that spirit.

Why This Program Is Built This Way

Every requirement in this handbook — the two-phase structure, the section sequence, the hour total, the placement of Meat Math and HACCP in Phase 2 rather than Phase 1 — was a deliberate design choice. This page explains why the program looks the way it does.

Phase 1 — Hands and Habits

Phase 1 is eight sections of meat cutting in the settings the trade is actually practiced in: Custom Exempt, Retail butcher shop, and small USDA-inspected plants. Sanitation. Inspection and grading. Knife care and safety. Lamb. Pork. Beef. Poultry. Packaging. The Training Agent's job in Phase 1 is to build the apprentice's habits, skills, and mastery of making cuts correctly. Speed comes later, with repetition. Cutting meat is the same work every day, but every animal is different from the last one. We are not cutting 2×4 lumber.

At 1,900 OJT hours and 144 hours of related instruction, an apprentice who completes Phase 1 has learned the trade at its foundation and earns the Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations. That credential is real, it is theirs to keep, and it is meaningful on its own.

Phase 2 — Built on the Foundation

Phase 2 is for the apprentice who has decided to go further. It opens with Harvest and Humane Handling, which is one of the hardest parts of the industry to hire for and to become proficient at. The knife skills built in Phase 1 carry directly into harvest work. Fresh Sausage Production and Smoked Meats and Curing follow — two of the parts of the trade many apprentices most want to master. Merchandising, Cutting Tests and Yield Analysis, Profitability and Inventory Controls, and Food Safety Systems and HACCP close out the phase.

Meat Math and HACCP are not optional and they are not academic. Without understanding, implementing, and completing the tests and documentation required to be profitable and to maintain regulatory compliance, the journeyworker does not have a job for long. Phase 2 places this work last because the apprentice has to have the cuts, the harvest skills, and the sausage and smoked meat work in their hands before the math has anything reliable to measure. Phase 2 adds 2,100 OJT hours and 144 hours of related instruction. At completion the apprentice earns the Journey-Level Certification in Meat Cutting / Advanced Processing & Production along with the federally registered apprenticeship credential issued through the U.S. Department of Labor.

Why Two Phases, 4,000 Hours

The two-phase structure honors what the apprentice actually needs when they walk in the door to become successful and profitable for the Training Agent. Many apprentices walk in saying they just want to learn how to cut meat. That is the right instinct, and it is also what the Training Agent needs them to learn first. The 4,000-hour OJT total plus 288 hours of related instruction is what this curriculum requires when it is organized this way. A Training Agent who sponsors an apprentice through this program receives a productive cutter at Phase 1 completion and a journey-level meat processing professional at Phase 2 completion. Both outcomes are documented, federally registered, and tied to competency standards the Training Agent verifies on their own production floor.

CHAPTER 1

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Origin of This Program

The NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program was built by Tracy Smaciarz — a fourth-generation meat industry professional whose family has worked in every part of the supply chain for more than a century. From cattle ranching, dairy operations, livestock hauling, and sale yards to the processing floor itself, the Smaciarz family has lived this industry across five generations currently active in the trade. Tracy grew up in the business, learned the craft from the ground up, and has spent decades not only working in it but teaching it.

When Tracy volunteered to serve as NWMPA's first Apprenticeship Training Director, it was not a career move. It was an act of service to an industry that feeds the country and that has watched its skilled workforce decline for years. Over four years in that role, Tracy saw firsthand what was driving apprentices out of the program before they ever reached journey level — and built this program to fix it.

What follows is the result of that work: the most rigorous, honest, and complete Journeyman Meat Cutter apprenticeship program currently registered with the U.S. Department of Labor. It was built by someone who knows the trade, knows the industry, and knows what a journey-level meat cutter actually needs to be able to do.

What Makes This Program Different

There is no shortage of people who have learned to cut meat. There is a shortage of people who have learned to cut meat correctly — safely, efficiently, profitably, and to a documented standard that holds up under federal inspection, under a busy production schedule, and under the financial pressure that every independent butcher shop and small processing plant operates under every day.

This program was built around three principles that distinguish it from every other meat cutting apprenticeship program currently registered in the United States.

Principle 1 — The Training Agent Is the Competency Authority

The scoring systems, written examinations, and OJT verification forms in this program are tools that support the Training Agent's judgment — not substitutes for it. The Training Agent is the shop owner or manager who works alongside the apprentice every day. They see things no form can capture: consistency under pressure, professional discipline, the instinct that develops from real production experience. The final determination of whether an apprentice has earned the Journeyman credential rests with the Training Agent who has watched them work.

This is how the trades have always worked. The master tradesperson certifies the journeyman. This program honors that tradition while providing the documentation structure that federal registration requires.

Principle 2 — Training Happens During Real Production

On-the-job training (OJT) hours in this program are not accumulated in training sessions pulled out of the production day. They are accumulated during actual production operations — on real product, in real conditions, with real consequences for quality, yield, and food safety. The apprentice learns by doing the work. The Training Agent teaches by using the production floor as the classroom.

This means that a single production day can develop competency across multiple sections simultaneously. An apprentice breaking beef primals is applying knife technique from Section 3, anatomical knowledge from Section 6, sanitation discipline from Section 1, and yield awareness from Section 5 — all at the same time. OJT hours accumulate across all active sections through the natural rhythm of the production week, not through a scheduled sequence of isolated training events.

Principle 3 — A Journeyman Meat Cutter Must Be a Profitable One

Technical skill is necessary. It is not sufficient. A journey-level meat cutter in a small-plant or independent butcher shop environment directly affects the financial viability of that business every day — through yield management, through pounds-per-hour production efficiency, through cut decisions that determine margin, and through the pricing discipline that keeps the operation solvent.

This program makes that standard explicit. The minimum pounds-per-hour production benchmarks defined in Phase 2 Section 6 are not guidelines. They are the minimum competency floor for Journeyman certification. An apprentice who cannot work at a pace that makes the facility productive has not demonstrated journey-level competency — regardless of hours accumulated or examination scores achieved. The Journeyman credential from this program means the holder can walk into a facility and perform at a level that justifies journey-level wages and supports the profitability of the operation.

The Dual Development Model

This program is designed to develop two people at the same time.

The apprentice is the obvious beneficiary. But the Training Agent — working through the facilitation guides, the competency verification process, the food safety field documentation, and the production efficiency standards section by section — is simultaneously strengthening their own operational discipline. A Training Agent who works through every section of this program will emerge with a more systematic approach to sanitation, a sharper understanding of their facility's yield performance, stronger

Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) documentation practices, and a clearer picture of their operation's profitability than they had when they started.

This is not a side effect of the program design. It is a feature of it. The best training agents are the ones who understand that teaching the trade makes them better at practicing it.

Federal Classification and Program Brand

This program is registered with the U.S. Department of Labor under O*NET-SOC code 51-3021.00 — All-Round Butcher (MEAT CUTTER), RAPIDS Code 0316HY. That is the federal occupation classification covering the full scope of work this program develops, from custom and retail butchery through harvest, sausage production, smoked meats, curing, and food safety systems. "Journeyman Meat Cutter" is the apprentice-facing program brand. It is the title used throughout this Handbook, on apprentice and Training Agent agreements, in apprentice and employer communications, and on the NWMPA-issued credentials. The federal occupation code is what the program is registered under; the brand is what apprentices, Training Agents, and the industry call it. Both refer to the same program.

Program At a Glance

Program Element	Detail
Occupation	All-Round Butcher (MEAT CUTTER) — O*NET-SOC 51-3021.00, RAPIDS 0316HY (federally registered occupation; "Journeyman Meat Cutter" is the apprentice-facing program brand)
Program sponsor	Northwest Meat Processors Association (NWMPA)
Curriculum owner	Tracy Smaczarz — Licensed to NWMPA
Registration authority	U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship — 29 CFR Part 29
Authorized states	Washington • Oregon • Idaho • Utah
Program type	Hybrid — 29 CFR 29.5(b)(2)(iii) (minimum OJT hours combined with verified competency demonstration)
Facility types	USDA-inspected, custom exempt, and retail butcher shop facilities; state-inspected facilities in Oregon (the only authorized state with a state inspection program)
Total OJT hours	4,000 hours (1,900 Phase 1 + 2,100 Phase 2)
Total Related Technical Instruction (RTI) hours	288 hours minimum (144 per phase)
Program duration	Approximately 2 years

Program Element	Detail
Number of sections	15 sections across two phases
Passing standard	80% on all written examinations
Credential issued	Journeyman Meat Cutter — U.S. Department of Labor

About the Northwest Meat Processors Association

The Northwest Meat Processors Association has served as a trade association for the meat cutting and butchery industry in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho since 1966. NWMPA is recognized nationally by the American Association of Meat Processors (AAMP) as a trade organization dedicated to the advancement of the profession across the three states it has historically served, now expanded to include Utah as a full program participant.

As program sponsor, NWMPA is responsible for the administration of the apprenticeship program within its authorized states, the qualification and approval of Training Agents, the registration of apprentices, the verification of on-the-job training (OJT) and related technical instruction (RTI) hour tracking, and the coordination of credential processing through the U.S. Department of Labor. NWMPA operates the program under a license from Tracy Smaczarz, who retains legal ownership of all curriculum materials.

CHAPTER 2**EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

The NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program is committed to equal opportunity in apprenticeship and will operate the apprenticeship program without discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age (40 and above), genetic information, or disability. The program sponsor will take affirmative action to provide equal opportunity in apprenticeship and will operate the apprenticeship program as required under 29 CFR Part 30.

Equal Opportunity Policy Statement

The Northwest Meat Processors Association and Tracy Smaciarz, as curriculum owner, are equal opportunity employers and program sponsors. All qualified applicants will be considered for apprenticeship without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, genetic information, or disability. This policy applies to all terms and conditions of program participation, including recruitment, selection, enrollment, training, assessment, advancement, and program completion.

The program sponsor will make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities throughout the program, consistent with applicable federal and state law. Apprentices or applicants who require accommodation should contact the Apprenticeship Training Director.

Affirmative Action Obligations

NWMPA, as program sponsor, takes affirmative action at the program level. NWMPA does not recruit, select, or hire apprentices — that is the Training Agent's responsibility as the employer. NWMPA's affirmative action commitments are program-wide: maintaining the program's written Affirmative Action Program; conducting the utilization analysis required by 29 CFR 30.5; supporting Training Agent outreach to underrepresented populations; monitoring apprentice participation, advancement, and completion rates across the program; and reviewing Training Agent EEO compliance. NWMPA reserves the right to suspend or revoke Training Agent approval for substantiated violations of 29 CFR Part 30.

Training Agents, as the employers in this program, are responsible for compliance with all applicable federal and state Equal Employment Opportunity laws, including 29 CFR Part 30, in the recruitment, selection, hiring, training, and retention of apprentices at their facility. Compliance is a condition of NWMPA approval. The Training Agent Agreement executed by each participating employer incorporates these obligations and authorizes NWMPA to monitor Training Agent EEO performance and to suspend or revoke approval for substantiated violations.

The NWMPA Affirmative Action Program

NWMPA maintains a written Affirmative Action Program (AAP) adopted under 29 CFR Part 30, separate from this Handbook. The AAP is the governing program-level document for NWMPA's equal opportunity commitments and is adopted at program registration to establish the affirmative action framework that will govern from the first apprentice forward. Tracy Smaciarz, Apprenticeship Training Director, is the designated AAP Officer responsible for AAP implementation, the utilization analysis required under 29 CFR 30.5, targeted outreach support, periodic review of program-level personnel processes, and complaint handling under the AAP. The AAP is made available to applicants, apprentices, and Training Agents on request. Once the program enrolls five or more registered apprentices, the AAP's full requirements under 29 CFR 30.4 apply to NWMPA's program-level operations; the program is structured to be in compliance from the first apprentice forward.

Complaint Procedure

Any apprentice or applicant who believes they have been discriminated against in connection with this apprenticeship program may file a complaint. Complaints must be filed in writing within 180 days of the alleged discrimination.

Filing with NWMPA

Complaints may be filed directly with the NWMPA Apprenticeship Training Director. Written complaints should describe the alleged discrimination in detail, including the date of the incident, the persons involved, and the nature of the discrimination alleged. The Training Director will acknowledge receipt within 10 business days and initiate a review of the complaint.

Filing with the U.S. Department of Labor

Complaints may also be filed with the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship, or with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Filing a complaint with NWMPA does not preclude a complainant from filing with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and filing with the DOL or the EEOC does not preclude filing with NWMPA.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Complaints — Contact Information

NWMPA Apprenticeship Training Director: apprenticeship@nwmpa.com

U.S. DOL Office of Apprenticeship — Corinna Pereira, State Director: (702) 388-6772 | pereira.corinna.j@dol.gov

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: www.eeoc.gov | 1-800-669-4000

Retaliation Prohibited

Retaliation against any person who files an EEO complaint, participates in an EEO complaint investigation, or otherwise exercises their rights under this equal opportunity policy is strictly prohibited. Any Training Agent or program representative found to have engaged in retaliation will be subject to immediate suspension or termination from the program.

CHAPTER 3

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program is organized into two phases. Phase 1 — the Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations — builds foundational competency in meat cutting, sanitation, inspection, and retail operations. Phase 2 — the Journey-Level Certification in Meat Cutting / Advanced Processing & Production — builds journey-level competency in advanced processing, production management, and food safety systems. Apprentices must complete all Phase 1 requirements before advancing to Phase 2.

The Two Credentials This Program Produces

This program is designed to produce two distinct, recognized credentials. They are not interchangeable — each represents a defined level of competency. An apprentice who completes Phase 1 holds a real credential. An apprentice who completes both phases holds a higher one. Both are issued by NWMPA and documented through the program's section certification process.

PHASE 1 CREDENTIAL

Certification in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations

Issued by the Northwest Meat Processors Association upon successful completion of all Phase 1 requirements. This is a standalone credential. It is earned independently of Phase 2 and recognizes full competency in the foundational skills of professional meat cutting within a small-plant or retail butcher shop environment.

PHASE 2 CREDENTIAL

Journey-Level Certification in Meat Cutting / Advanced Processing & Production

Issued by the Northwest Meat Processors Association upon successful completion of all Phase 2 requirements. Requires prior completion of Phase 1. Upon completion of both phases, the apprentice also receives the federally recognized Journeyman Meat Cutter credential issued through the U.S. Department of Labor.

The Two-Phase Model

Phase	Title	Sections	OJT Hours	Related Technical Instruction (RTI) Hours
Phase 1	Certification in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations	8 sections	1,900 hours minimum	144 hours minimum
Phase 2	Journey-Level Certification / Advanced Processing & Production	7 sections	2,100 hours minimum	144 hours minimum
Total Program	Journeyman Meat Cutter	15 sections	4,000 hours minimum	288 hours minimum

OJT Hours Are Minimums, Not Schedules

The OJT hours listed for each section and phase are minimums — the floor below which a section cannot be considered complete. They are not training schedules. If more time is needed to reach the required competency standard, take it. A section is complete when the apprentice demonstrates the competencies. The hours establish the floor, not the finish line.

How OJT Hours Accumulate

On-the-job training hours in this program do not accumulate through scheduled sessions devoted to one section at a time. They accumulate through real production work — and a single production day will typically develop competency across multiple sections simultaneously.

Consider what happens during a day when beef primals are on the floor. The apprentice is applying knife technique (Section 3), executing anatomical breakdown sequences (Section 6), maintaining sanitation discipline throughout fabrication (Section 1), monitoring product temperatures (covered across multiple sections), and building the production efficiency that will eventually be measured against the pounds-per-hour certification standard (Phase 2, Section 6). All of this happens in the same shift.

A lamb carcass may come through the facility only once a month. When it does, the apprentice is not starting from zero on lamb fabrication skills — they have been building the knife discipline, carcass orientation instincts, seam cutting technique, and yield awareness every day on every species that has crossed the floor since they started. The lamb-specific OJT hours are logged when lamb is in production. The competencies those hours measure have been developing continuously.

This is how the trade is actually learned. This program is built to reflect that reality, not to impose an artificial sequence on it.

Weekly Hour Tracking

OJT hours are tracked weekly by section through a shared tracking log provided to each Training Agent at the start of the program. The Training Agent logs hours worked by topic each week to ensure accuracy and to prevent hours from being reconstructed after the fact. A complete monthly summary is submitted to the Apprenticeship Training Director by the 10th of each month.

Phase 1 — Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations

Phase 1 develops the foundational skills that every meat cutter must have before advancing to journey-level production work. The eight sections cover sanitation and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP), carcass inspection and grading, knife care and safety, species-specific fabrication, and packaging and labeling. All eight sections are required for all apprentices, with the conditional exception noted for Section 7.

Section	Title	OJT Hours
Section 1	Sanitation & SSOP	160 hours
Section 2	Inspection & Grading	120 hours
Section 3	Knife Care & Safety	120 hours
Section 4	Lamb Breaking, Custom Cutting & Grind Allocation	220 hours
Section 5	Pork Breaking, Custom Cutting & Grind Management	380 hours
Section 6	Beef Breaking, Custom Cutting & Grind Operations	540 hours
Section 7 ★	Poultry Fabrication	100 hours (conditional — see note)
Section 8	Packaging & Labeling	260 hours
Phase 1 Total		1,900 hours

★ Section 7 — Poultry Fabrication: Conditional OJT

*The Poultry Fabrication curriculum is mandatory for all apprentices — all apprentices must complete the instructional content and will be examined on it. The 100-hour OJT component is conditional. At facilities that process poultry as part of regular operations, the 100 hours stay **in Section 7**. At facilities that do not process poultry, the 100 hours redirect to another approved Phase 1 section under a Board-approved redirect protocol. The Phase 1 total of 1,900 hours and the program total of 4,000 hours are unchanged.*

Phase 2 — Journey-Level Certification in Meat Cutting / Advanced Processing & Production

Phase 2 develops journey-level competency across the advanced production, processing, and business management skills that define a fully qualified Journeyman Meat Cutter. All seven sections of Phase 2 are required.

Section	Title	OJT Hours
Section 1 •	Harvest / Humane Handling	450 hours
Section 2	Fresh Sausage Production	250 hours
Section 3	Smoked Meats & Curing	350 hours
Section 4	Meat Merchandising	200 hours
Section 5	Cutting Tests & Yield Analysis	250 hours
Section 6	Profitability / Markup % & Inventory Controls	200 hours
Section 7 ★★	Food Safety Systems / HACCP	400 hours
Phase 2 Total		2,100 hours

• Section 1 — Harvest / Humane Handling: Non-Harvest Facilities

Phase 2 Section 1 applies to facilities that conduct harvest (slaughter) operations under U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or state inspection. Facilities that do not harvest must contact the Apprenticeship Training Director before beginning Phase 2 to activate the approved OJT hour redirect protocol. The 450 hours are redirected to other Phase 2 sections — the total program hour requirement does not change.

★★ Section 7 — The Capstone Standard

Phase 2 Section 7 (Food Safety Systems / HACCP) is the final section of the program and carries special significance. Journey-level certification — and the 100% journey-level wage — is earned upon successful completion of Section 7. It is the capstone because food safety systems competency connects every other discipline in the program: sanitation, fabrication, temperature control, documentation, and corrective action. A Journeyman Meat Cutter who cannot operate within a HACCP system is not fully qualified. Section 7 is where that qualification is confirmed.

Phase 1 Completion — Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations

When an apprentice completes all Phase 1 requirements and receives the NWMPA Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations, three paths are available:

Path	Description	Wage
Continue to Phase 2	Apprentice enrolls in Phase 2 immediately or within the re-entry window. Remains an active apprentice in the program.	Step 2 wage rate — 85% of the applicable journeyworker wage. Training Agent determines actual wage at or above this floor.
Stop at Phase 1	Apprentice holds the Phase 1 certificate as their credential. They are no longer an active apprentice. Their compensation is a matter between them and their employer.	No program wage floor applies. The apprentice is no longer enrolled and compensation is between them and their employer. The state and local minimum wage floor applies as required by law.
Re-enter Phase 2 later	Apprentice stops at Phase 1 and re-enters Phase 2 within the 2-year re-entry window. See re-entry rules below.	Step 2 wage rate — 85% at re-entry. Training Agent at the re-entry facility determines actual wage.

Wage at Phase 1 Completion

An apprentice who continues into Phase 2 (immediately or via re-entry) advances to the Step 2 wage rate — 85% of the applicable journeyworker wage — upon Phase 1 completion. An apprentice who stops at Phase 1 is no longer enrolled in the program; their compensation is between them and their employer, subject to the applicable state or local minimum wage. See Chapter 8 for the full wage schedule.

Phase 2 Re-Entry Rules — Journey-Level Certification

An apprentice who holds the NWMPA Phase 1 certificate and chooses to pursue Phase 2 at a later date must do so within the re-entry window and in accordance with the following rules.

The 2-Year Re-Entry Window

An apprentice has two years from the date of their Phase 1 certificate to re-enter Phase 2. Re-entry requests must be submitted to the Apprenticeship Training Director. After two years, the Phase 1 certificate remains valid permanently — the credential does not expire — but re-entry into Phase 2 is no longer available under standard program rules.

Hardship Extension

An apprentice who is unable to re-enter Phase 2 within the 2-year window due to documented exceptional circumstances may submit a written hardship request to the Apprenticeship Training Director. Qualifying circumstances include but are not limited to serious illness or injury, military service, or documented family emergency. The hardship request must be submitted in writing, must describe the circumstances, and must include supporting documentation where available. The Training Director's decision on a hardship extension is final.

Training Agent at Re-Entry

An apprentice may re-enter Phase 2 with their original Training Agent or with any other NWMPA-approved Training Agent. The apprentice continues Phase 2 from where they left off — there is no requirement to restart Phase 2 sections already completed. If an apprentice moves to a new employer who is an approved Training Agent, their Phase 2 progress carries with them.

Probationary Period at Re-Entry

Completion of Phase 1 satisfies the program's probationary period requirement. An apprentice re-entering Phase 2 does not serve a new probationary period, regardless of whether they are re-entering with their original Training Agent or a new one.

No Re-Entry After 2-Year Window Without Hardship Approval

An apprentice who does not re-enter Phase 2 within two years of Phase 1 completion — and who does not receive an approved hardship extension — may not re-enter Phase 2 under the standard program. They retain their Phase 1 credential permanently. If they wish to pursue Phase 2 after the window has closed without an approved hardship extension, they must re-enroll in the program as a new apprentice beginning with Phase 1.

Program Records — Official Record and Personal Responsibility

NWMPA maintains the official program record for every enrolled apprentice. The official record is built from what the Training Agent reports and what the Apprenticeship Training Director verifies. It is the governing record of the program.

The Official Record Is What Was Reported and Verified

If hours were worked but never reported by the Training Agent, they do not exist in the official record. If there is a discrepancy between what an apprentice believes they completed and what the official record shows, the official record governs. NWMPA is not responsible for reconstructing hours that were never submitted.

Every apprentice is strongly advised to maintain their own personal copy of all program records throughout their participation. This includes:

- Completed OJT hour logs by section
- Signed Section Certification documents for each completed section
- Completed OJT Competency Verification forms
- Written examination records with date and score
- Phase 1 certificate upon completion

An apprentice's personal copy is their independent evidence if a discrepancy arises between their records and the official record — particularly when changing Training Agents or facilities. The responsibility to maintain those personal records rests entirely with the apprentice. If records were not kept and a discrepancy exists, the official NWMPA record governs with no exceptions.

Changing Training Agents or Facilities

When an apprentice moves to a new Training Agent or facility, they should bring their complete personal record file with them. The new Training Agent will need documented evidence of what sections have been completed and what hours have been accumulated. The Apprenticeship Training Director can verify official records, but the apprentice's personal copy is the fastest and most reliable way to establish continuity at a new facility.

CHAPTER 4

APPRENTICE QUALIFICATIONS AND ENROLLMENT

This chapter is written primarily for apprentices. Training Agents should also read it — understanding what the program requires of apprentices from the beginning helps Training Agents set expectations and make sound enrollment decisions.

Minimum Qualifications

To be eligible for enrollment in the NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program, an applicant must meet all of the following minimum requirements:

- **Age:** Must be 18 years of age or older at the time of enrollment.
- **Education:** Must have completed high school with a diploma or General Educational Development (GED) equivalency.
- **Physical capability:** Must be able to meet the physical demands of the meat processing environment, with or without reasonable accommodation. The work involves prolonged standing, repetitive motion, cold temperatures, and the use of sharp tools and powered equipment.
- **Employment:** Must be employed by an NWMPA-approved Training Agent facility at the time of enrollment. Enrollment in the program is not possible without an approved Training Agent employer.

No NWMPA Interview Required

NWMPA does not conduct interviews to determine individual applicant qualifications. The Training Agent — as the employer — is responsible for assessing whether an individual is a suitable candidate for apprenticeship at their facility. The Training Agent's decision to enroll an apprentice constitutes acceptance into the program.

Finding a Training Agent

NWMPA operates under an employer-driven selection model. Each NWMPA-approved Training Agent makes its own hiring decisions for apprentice positions at its facility, using the Training Agent's established hiring practices and in compliance with all applicable federal and state Equal Employment Opportunity requirements, including 29 CFR Part 30. Apprenticeship in this program requires employment at an NWMPA-approved Training Agent facility. Applicants enter the program through one of two pathways: (a) by being hired directly by an NWMPA-approved Training Agent, or (b) by contacting the NWMPA Apprenticeship Training Director, who maintains a current list of Training Agents actively accepting apprentices and will direct the applicant to those employers. A Training Agent may also select apprentices from its existing workforce or through its established promotion policy.

NWMPA does not conduct sponsor-level interviews and does not place apprentices with Training Agents. The employment relationship is between the apprentice and the Training Agent. The Training Agent's decision to enroll an individual as an apprentice constitutes acceptance into the NWMPA program. The Training Agent's selection decision is final, subject to compliance with the EEO requirements above. NWMPA's role is to qualify Training Agents, register apprentices in RAPIDS, verify program compliance, monitor Training Agent EEO compliance, and administer credentials.

Enrollment Process

Enrollment follows a defined sequence. Both the Training Agent and the apprentice have responsibilities in this process. Enrollment is not complete until all steps are finished and the apprentice is registered in Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Data System (RAPIDS).

Step	Action	Responsibility
1	Training Agent submits the apprentice enrollment form to the Apprenticeship Training Director within 45 days of the apprentice's start date in the program.	Training Agent
2	Apprenticeship Training Director reviews the enrollment form, confirms the Training Agent's active status, and registers the apprentice in the program.	Training Director
3	Apprentice is registered in RAPIDS — the U.S. Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Data System. RAPIDS registration is required for all federally registered apprenticeship programs.	Training Director
4	Apprentice receives the program handbook and signs the Apprentice Agreement.	Apprentice
5	Training Agent signs the Training Agent Agreement for the enrolled apprentice.	Training Agent
6	Training Agent receives the Phase 1 document package and begins the Section Readiness process per Chapter 5.	Training Agent

RAPIDS Registration

RAPIDS is the federal system through which DOL tracks registered apprentices. Every apprentice in this program must be registered in RAPIDS. Registration is handled by the Apprenticeship Training Director — the apprentice does not register directly. If an apprentice's status changes — completion, withdrawal, transfer, or suspension — that change must be reported to the Training Director promptly so RAPIDS records can be updated.

The Probationary Period

Every apprentice in this program serves a probationary period at the beginning of their enrollment. The probationary period exists to give the Training Agent adequate time to evaluate whether the apprentice is a suitable fit for the program and for the facility before the full protections of the apprenticeship agreement take effect.

Length of the Probationary Period

Every apprentice serves a probationary period of 1,000 hours from the date of program enrollment. The probationary period does not exceed 25% of the program's required OJT hours, consistent with 29 CFR 29.5(b)(8). During the probationary period, the apprentice receives full credit for hours worked and competencies demonstrated toward program completion.

Training Agent Rights During Probation

During the probationary period, the Training Agent may terminate the apprentice's enrollment without cause and without written explanation to NWMPA. The Training Agent is the employer and retains full employment authority during this period. Termination during probation must be reported to the Apprenticeship Training Director within 5 business days so RAPIDS records can be updated.

After the Probationary Period

Once the probationary period is completed, the Training Agent retains the right to terminate an apprentice's enrollment for cause — including failure to meet competency standards, failure to complete required reading, conduct issues, or other documented program deficiencies. Termination after the probationary period requires written notice to the Apprenticeship Training Director detailing the specific grounds for termination. The apprentice has the right to file a grievance in response to post-probationary termination per the procedures in Chapter 11.

Effect of Granted Hours on Probationary Period

The 1,000-hour probationary period is not reduced by the granting of advanced standing or prior-experience credit under Chapter 10, consistent with 29 CFR 29.5(b)(8) and the program's registered

Standards. An apprentice who has been granted hours still serves the full 1,000-hour probationary period from the date of program enrollment.

Transferring During Probation

If an apprentice transfers to a new Training Agent during the probationary period, the probationary clock carries with them. Hours accumulated at the original facility count toward the probationary period at the new facility. The apprentice does not restart the probationary period upon transfer.

Transferring Between Training Agents

An apprentice may transfer from one NWMPA-approved Training Agent to another at any point in the program. Transfers must be reported to the Apprenticeship Training Director promptly. The following rules apply to all transfers:

- The apprentice's accumulated OJT hours, completed section certifications, and competency verifications transfer with them. Credit already earned is not lost.
- The apprentice should bring their complete personal record file to the new Training Agent at the start of the transfer. The Training Director can verify official records, but the apprentice's personal copy expedites the transition.
- The new Training Agent reviews the apprentice's progress and picks up training at the appropriate point in the program. There is no requirement to repeat sections already completed and certified.
- If the apprentice is within the probationary period, the probationary clock continues at the new facility as described above.
- RAPIDS records must be updated to reflect the transfer. The Training Director handles this upon notification.

Withdrawal from the Program

An apprentice who chooses to withdraw from the program voluntarily must notify both their Training Agent and the Apprenticeship Training Director in writing. Upon withdrawal, the apprentice's RAPIDS record is updated to reflect the withdrawal status.

An apprentice who withdraws after completing Phase 1 retains the NWMPA Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations. The Phase 1 credential is not revoked by withdrawal from Phase 2. The 2-year re-entry window begins on the date of Phase 1 certificate issuance, not the date of withdrawal from Phase 2.

An apprentice who withdraws before completing Phase 1 does not receive a credential. Partial completion of Phase 1 does not result in any certificate or credential from NWMPA or from DOL.

CHAPTER 5

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

This chapter covers the OJT requirements that apply to both apprentices and Training Agents throughout the program. Training Agents should read this chapter carefully before enrolling their first apprentice. Apprentices should read it to understand what the program requires of them and of their employer during the training period.

How OJT Hours Work in This Program

On-the-job training hours in the NWMPA program accumulate through real production work. They are not scheduled training sessions pulled out of the production day. They are the hours the apprentice spends working in the facility, doing the actual work of the operation, under the supervision and instruction of a qualified Training Agent.

A single production day will typically develop competency across multiple sections simultaneously. Knife discipline built in Section 3 is applied every time a carcass is broken. Sanitation procedures from Section 1 are executed every shift regardless of what species is on the floor. Yield awareness from Phase 2 Section 5 develops with every fabrication run. The apprentice is not moving from one section to another in a linear sequence — they are building competency across the program continuously through the work they do every day.

Cross-Section, Cross-Phase Production Is Normal

On any given production day or week, an apprentice may be working on, learning from, or being observed against material from any section in either phase. A Phase 1 apprentice breaking beef may also be observing harvest the same morning at a facility that runs both, and the work informs Phase 2 Section 1 competency long before the apprentice has formally entered Phase 2. The certification and credential sequence — Phase 1 first, then Phase 2, with section certifications inside each — governs what gets formally documented and when. It does not govern what the apprentice's hands touch on the floor. The Training Agent records OJT hours against whichever section the production work matches; competency development that crosses section or phase boundaries is the natural rhythm of the trade, not an exception to be reconciled.

Some species or production programs come through a facility infrequently. A lamb carcass may appear once a month. Smoked product runs may happen twice a week. The apprentice is not expected to accumulate all lamb hours in a single lamb day — those hours build over time as lamb comes through the facility. The competencies measured at section completion reflect skills that have developed continuously across the full training period, not skills learned in a single dedicated session.

The Section Hour Requirement Is a Floor, Not a Schedule

OJT hours listed for each section are the minimum required before a section may be considered complete. They are not a training schedule. The Training Agent does not set aside a fixed block of time to 'complete' a section. Hours accumulate naturally through production. When the minimum hours are met and the competencies are verified, the section is complete.

Weekly Hour Tracking

OJT hours are tracked weekly by section using the program's shared hour-tracking log. Each Training Agent receives access to the log at the time of enrollment. The log records hours worked by topic each week and is shared directly with the Apprenticeship Training Director. A complete monthly summary is submitted to the Training Director by the 10th of each month for review and verification.

- **Training Agent responsibility:** Log the apprentice's OJT hours by section topic each week in the shared tracking log. Weekly logging is required for accuracy — hours may not be reconstructed after the fact. Submit a complete monthly summary to the Apprenticeship Training Director by the 10th of each month.
- **Apprentice responsibility:** Maintain your own copy of your weekly hours. Do not rely solely on the Training Agent's log or the official NWMPA record as your only documentation.
- **Training Director responsibility:** Review and verify hour tracking against program requirements on an ongoing basis. Flag discrepancies to the Training Agent promptly.

Hours that were worked but not logged in the tracking system do not exist in the official record. The official record is built from what was reported and verified. See Chapter 3 for the full record-keeping policy.

Supervision Requirements

The NWMPA program requires that apprentices work under the supervision of a journey-level meat cutter for at least 75% of their working time. This requirement applies throughout the program — from the first day of enrollment through the final section of Phase 2.

Apprentice-to-Journeyworker Ratio

The required ratio is one apprentice to one journeyworker per worksite or plant. One journey-level worker supervises one apprentice. The ratio must be maintained at all times — it is not permissible to run the training floor without the required journeyworker coverage for each active apprentice.

75% Supervision Standard

At least 75% of the apprentice's working time must be spent under the direct supervision of a journey-level worker. If an apprentice believes this standard is not being met, they should bring it to the attention of the Apprenticeship Training Director. The Training Director will log the concern and determine whether further action is required.

Reasonably Full-Time Employment

Training Agents are required to offer apprentices reasonably full-time employment throughout the program. The meat processing industry has natural seasonal variation — there are periods of the year when facilities operate at higher volume and periods when volume is lower. Reasonably full-time employment accounts for this variation.

A facility that averages full-time hours across the year — even if individual weeks vary from 30 to 50 hours — meets the reasonably full-time standard. A facility that is only open for six months of the year, or that cannot offer consistent year-round employment, may not be suitable as a Training Agent facility. If a Training Agent cannot maintain reasonably full-time employment for an apprentice due to extraordinary circumstances, they should contact the Apprenticeship Training Director to discuss the situation before it affects the apprentice's program progress.

Facility Coverage Requirements

Not every Training Agent facility will cover every section of the program. The program is built for the real-world diversity of small-plant and retail butcher shop operations — some facilities harvest, some do not. Some process poultry, some do not. Some run full sausage production programs, others focus on retail fabrication.

A Training Agent facility must cover a minimum of six of the fifteen program sections through direct on-the-floor production experience. Sections that a facility cannot cover because the relevant production does not occur at that facility must be handled through one of the following approaches:

Alternate Training Agent Placement

For sections where the primary Training Agent's facility does not provide the required production experience, the Training Agent arranges for the apprentice to work at an alternate NWMPA-approved Training Agent facility for a minimum of 40 hours in that section's applicable production area. The primary Training Agent remains responsible for the apprentice's wages during the alternate placement and reports those hours in the weekly tracking log.

The primary Training Agent may require the apprentice to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement before working at an alternate facility. Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) arrangements are managed directly between the Training Agents involved — NWMPA does not administer or adjudicate NDA agreements.

Geographic Hardship

If the nearest alternate Training Agent facility is a significant distance from the primary facility — creating a hardship for the apprentice or the Training Agent — the primary Training Agent should submit a written hardship explanation to the Apprenticeship Training Director. The Training Director will evaluate the situation and determine how the affected section hours should be reallocated within sections the facility does cover. This determination is made on a case-by-case basis and must be approved before any hour reallocation takes effect.

Conditional Sections — Poultry and Harvest

Phase 1 Section 7 (Poultry Fabrication) and Phase 2 Section 1 (Harvest / Humane Handling) have established conditional protocols for facilities that do not operate those production programs. See Chapter 3 for the specific rules governing these sections. Training Agents must contact the Apprenticeship Training Director before starting any conditional section to activate the appropriate protocol.

Section Completion Standard

A section is complete when all of the following conditions are met:

1. The minimum OJT hours for the section have been accumulated and logged.
2. All topics in the section have been facilitated and recorded on the Topic Completion Tracker.
3. The apprentice has completed all Learning Checkpoints independently.
4. The OJT Competency Verification is complete with a minimum score of 2 — Meets Standard — in every competency category.
5. Required reading for the section has been completed and certified by the apprentice.
6. The Food Safety Field Worksheet has been completed for applicable sections.
7. The apprentice has passed the written examination with a score of 80% or above.
8. The Training Agent has signed and submitted the Section Certification to the Apprenticeship Training Director.

The Training Agent Makes the Final Call

Meeting all eight conditions listed above is necessary — but it is not always sufficient on its own. The Training Agent is the final authority on whether an apprentice has demonstrated genuine journey-level competency for a section. If the Training Agent has legitimate concerns about an apprentice's readiness despite meeting the technical requirements, those concerns should be raised with the Apprenticeship Training Director before the Section Certification is submitted.

Granting Hours — Advanced Standing

A Training Agent may apply to grant OJT hours to an apprentice who has documented prior experience in areas covered by the program. Hour grants are not automatic — they require formal application and Board approval. See Chapter 10 for the full granting-hours procedure.

CHAPTER 6

RELATED TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION (RTI)

Related Technical Instruction is the academic and study component of the apprenticeship program that complements on-the-job training. RTI is how apprentices build the theoretical foundation that makes their floor training meaningful. This chapter explains what RTI is, how it is delivered in this program, what the requirements are, and how it is tracked.

What RTI Is

Related Technical Instruction is the off-the-job learning component of a registered apprenticeship program. Under 29 CFR Part 29, every registered apprenticeship program must include a defined RTI component that supports the OJT. RTI is not classroom instruction at a university or trade school. In this program, RTI is the structured reading, curriculum study, and learning checkpoint work that the apprentice completes on their own time — using the program's Apprentice Curriculum documents and the three required reference texts.

RTI and OJT are complementary. The apprentice reads and studies the curriculum content on their own time. They arrive at the production floor having engaged with the material. The Training Agent's job is to bring that material to life through real production work — not to introduce the content for the first time. An apprentice who arrives on the floor without having done the reading will fall behind, will not perform well on written examinations, and will not develop the depth of understanding that the Journeyman credential requires.

RTI Hour Requirements

The program requires a minimum of 288 RTI hours across the full two-phase program — 144 RTI hours per phase. RTI hours are tracked separately from OJT hours and are reported and documented independently.

Phase	Minimum RTI Hours	How Earned
Phase 1	144 hours minimum	Required reading from the three reference texts + Apprentice Curriculum study + Learning Checkpoint completion across all 8 sections
Phase 2	144 hours minimum	Required reading from the three reference texts + Apprentice Curriculum study + Learning Checkpoint completion across all 7 sections
Total Program	288 hours minimum	

RTI Is the Apprentice's Time

RTI hours are completed on the apprentice's own time. They are not paid by the Training Agent. The apprentice is responsible for completing RTI on their own schedule — at home, during lunch breaks, or at whatever time works for them. The Training Agent is not responsible for providing RTI time during the workday.

OJT-to-RTI Ratio

The federal standard for registered apprenticeship programs requires a defined relationship between OJT hours and RTI hours. The NWMPA program meets this requirement with 144 RTI hours per phase (288 RTI hours total across 4,000 OJT hours). This ratio is consistent with DOL standards under 29 CFR Part 29 and is documented in the program's Standards of Apprenticeship.

How RTI Is Delivered in This Program

The federally registered RTI delivery method for this program is **Self-Study with Training Agent / Employer-Based Related Instruction**, as set forth in Appendix A of the program's Standards of Apprenticeship. RTI is delivered through three connected components, all of which work together — none of them is optional. The apprentice completes the self-study work on their own time using the program's curriculum and required reading; the Training Agent reinforces and verifies that work on the production floor through facilitated discussion and Learning Checkpoint review.

Component 1 — The Apprentice Curriculum

Every section of the program has a dedicated Apprentice Curriculum document — Document 1 of the three-document package. The Apprentice Curriculum contains all instructional content for that section: regulatory frameworks, technical principles, production standards, worked examples, and discussion questions. The apprentice reads and studies the curriculum content before and during the section. This is the primary RTI document for every section.

The apprentice works through the curriculum on their own time. They read the assigned content, work through the examples, and prepare for the discussion questions the Training Agent will use on the production floor. The curriculum is not read once and set aside — it is a reference that the apprentice returns to throughout the section as topics are covered on the floor.

Component 2 — Required Reading

Every section of the Apprentice Curriculum includes a Required Reading section — Section 5 of every curriculum document — that specifies the chapters and references the apprentice must read from the three program reference texts before the written examination for that section is administered. The required readings are section-specific and change with each section to match the technical content being evaluated.

The three reference texts used across the program are:

- **The Meat We Eat — 14th Edition**
- **Meat Science Laboratory Manual — 9th Edition**
- **The Meat Buyers Guide — 8th Edition (IMPS/NAMP)**

The required reading is the academic foundation of the written examination. The examinations are built on it. An apprentice who has not completed the required reading for a section will not be prepared for the written examination — and the Training Agent will be able to tell on the production floor. Reading is not optional and it is not a formality.

Required Reading Must Be Completed Before the Written Examination

The Training Agent must confirm that the apprentice has certified completion of the required reading before administering the written examination. The apprentice certifies reading completion to the Training Agent. The Training Agent records this certification as part of the examination administration record. The written examination may not be administered until this certification is complete.

Component 3 — Learning Checkpoints

Each topic in the Apprentice Curriculum ends with a Learning Checkpoint — a short set of scenario-based questions the apprentice completes independently, without notes or reference materials, before the Training Agent facilitates the Discussion Questions for that topic. Learning Checkpoints use the program's four training characters — Hunter, Sheri, Callen, and Taylor — in real production scenarios drawn from the topic content.

Learning Checkpoints are self-checks, not graded assessments. Their purpose is to confirm that the apprentice has retained the core content of the topic before moving into higher-order facilitated discussion. If an apprentice cannot answer a Learning Checkpoint question accurately, that is a signal that specific content needs reinforcement before the floor discussion proceeds. The Training Agent uses that signal to address the gap directly in the production context.

Learning Checkpoint completion counts toward RTI hours. The time the apprentice spends working through checkpoints independently is RTI time.

RTI Reporting and Tracking

RTI hours are reported as part of the hour-tracking process. The Training Agent logs the apprentice's RTI hours — curriculum study time, required reading, and Learning Checkpoint completion —

alongside OJT hours in the weekly tracking log. A complete monthly summary including RTI hours is submitted to the Apprenticeship Training Director by the 10th of each month. The Training Director verifies RTI progress against phase minimums on an ongoing basis.

Training Agent Role in RTI Reporting

The Training Agent does not supervise or direct the apprentice's RTI time. RTI is completed on the apprentice's own time at the apprentice's own pace. The Training Agent's role is to report the RTI hours the apprentice has completed each week — based on what the apprentice reports to them — and to confirm that required reading has been completed before administering each section's written examination.

Falling Behind on RTI

RTI must progress at a reasonable pace alongside OJT. An apprentice who is significantly behind on RTI — as evidenced by poor Learning Checkpoint performance, inability to engage with curriculum content on the floor, or failure to certify required reading completion in a timely manner — may be subject to the disciplinary procedures described in Chapter 11. Falling behind on RTI does not automatically freeze wage progression, but it will delay section completion since the written examination cannot be administered until required reading is certified.

The Written Examination Standard

Every section of the program ends with a 50-question written examination. The passing standard for all written examinations in this program is 80%. This standard applies to every section in Phase 1 and every section in Phase 2 without exception.

Examination Element	Standard
Number of questions	50 questions per section
Passing score	80% or above (40 of 50 questions correct)
Conditions	Independent completion — no notes, no reference materials, no access to the curriculum
Location	Controlled setting, separate from the production floor
Re-attempt waiting period	Minimum one week between attempts
Re-attempt limit	No limit on attempts
Re-attempt process	Training Agent identifies deficiency areas, provides additional floor time and study time before re-administering

An apprentice who scores below 80% may not advance to the next section. The Training Agent identifies the specific areas where the apprentice scored below standard, provides targeted floor time and additional study time focused on those areas, and re-administers the examination after a minimum of one week. There is no limit on re-attempts — the goal is that the apprentice passes because they genuinely know the material.

All Examination Attempts Must Be Documented

Every examination attempt — including failed attempts — must be documented with the date, score, and corrective action taken between attempts. These records are retained as part of the section file. An examination history that shows multiple attempts followed by improvement demonstrates a program working as designed. An examination history with no documentation of failed attempts is an incomplete record.

HACCP Preparation, Not Certification

The program prepares the apprentice for HACCP certification through the food safety systems instruction in Phase 2 Section 7 and the food safety field documentation practiced across multiple sections throughout both phases. The program does not itself confer HACCP certification. Formal HACCP certification requires completion of an accredited HACCP training course (offered by IHA, AFDO, AAMP, and other accredited providers). The Journeyman Meat Cutter who completes this program is well-positioned to pursue accredited HACCP certification when an employer requires it.

CHAPTER 7

COMPETENCY VERIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT

This chapter explains how apprentice competency is measured, documented, and certified in the NWMPA program. Both apprentices and Training Agents should read it carefully. Understanding the assessment system before training begins prevents misunderstandings at section completion and ensures that records are maintained correctly from the start.

The Competency-Based Model

This program operates under the Hybrid approach authorized by 29 CFR 29.5(b)(2)(iii). Skill acquisition is measured through the combination of (a) the minimum OJT hours required for each section and (b) successful demonstration of competency in the work processes that section covers. Both conditions must be satisfied — hours alone are not enough, and demonstrated competency before the hour minimum is reached does not advance the apprentice. Hours are the floor. Competency is the standard.

An apprentice who accumulates the minimum OJT hours for a section but cannot demonstrate the required competencies has not completed that section. An apprentice who demonstrates competency before the minimum hours are reached must still meet the hour floor before the section can be certified. Both conditions must be satisfied. Neither alone is sufficient.

The Training Agent is the competency authority. They observe the apprentice work every day. They know what the apprentice can do independently, what they can do with prompting, and what they still cannot do reliably. The assessment instruments described in this chapter are tools that support and document the Training Agent’s judgment. They do not replace it.

The Three Assessment Instruments

Every section ends with three assessment instruments, all contained in Document 3 — the Assessment and Administration Package. Each instrument has a specific purpose and a defined sequence. They must be administered in order.

Instrument	Purpose	Sequence
OJT Competency Verification	Ongoing evaluation of the apprentice’s floor performance against defined competency categories. Scored by the Training Agent throughout the section as competency is demonstrated during production. Not a single end-of-section event.	First — must be complete before examination is administered

Instrument	Purpose	Sequence
Food Safety Field Worksheet	Structured field record completed during production for sections with active HACCP or food safety requirements. Documents that the apprentice can identify, monitor, and respond to critical control points in real time.	Concurrent with OJT Competency Verification — completed during production, not after the fact
Written Examination	50-question examination administered after the OJT Competency Verification is complete and required readings are certified. Completed independently by the apprentice in a controlled setting away from the production floor.	Last — administered only after all prior conditions are met

The OJT Competency Verification

The OJT Competency Verification is the primary instrument for documenting apprentice competency on the production floor. It uses a four-point scoring scale applied by the Training Agent to each defined competency category for the section.

Score	Rating	Meaning
3	Exceeds Standard	The apprentice performs the competency independently, accurately, and with the judgment and efficiency that reflects journey-level work. No prompting required. Consistent across multiple observations.
2	Meets Standard	The apprentice performs the competency independently and accurately. This is the minimum passing standard in every competency category. Consistent performance without prompting.
1	Needs Improvement	The apprentice performs the competency with errors, inconsistency, or requires prompting. Do not advance. Identify the specific gap, provide targeted floor time, and re-evaluate.
0	Not Demonstrated	The apprentice has not yet performed the competency or cannot perform it. Do not advance.

Minimum Passing Standard: Score of 2 in Every Category

A score of 2 — Meets Standard — is required in every competency category before the written examination may be administered. A single score of 1 or 0 in any category means the examination cannot proceed. There are no exceptions and no averaging. Every category must be at 2 or above.

When a Score of 1 Is Recorded

When the Training Agent records a score of 1 in any competency category, the process is straightforward: identify the specific gap, provide additional targeted floor time focused on that exact gap, and re-evaluate before scheduling the examination. Document the additional training time and the re-evaluation result. The apprentice is not penalized for a score of 1 — it is information, not a failure. It tells the Training Agent precisely where more work is needed.

Scoring Is Ongoing, Not End-of-Section

The OJT Competency Verification is not administered at the end of the section as a single evaluation event. It is completed throughout the section as the Training Agent observes the apprentice performing the work. Some categories will reach a score of 2 or 3 early in the section. Others will develop more slowly. The Training Agent scores each category when they have observed sufficient performance to make a reliable determination — not on a fixed schedule.

The Training Agent may observe and document competency from any section while the apprentice is engaged in any production work — a single shift may produce competency observations against multiple sections in either phase. The Training Agent records each observation against the section it demonstrates, regardless of which section the apprentice is currently “on” in the certification sequence.

The Food Safety Field Worksheet

For sections that involve active food safety systems — including sanitation monitoring, HACCP plan execution, temperature control, and corrective action documentation — the apprentice must complete a Food Safety Field Worksheet during actual production operations. This is not a written exercise completed after the fact. It is a real-time field record that documents the apprentice’s ability to identify, monitor, and respond to critical control points during live production.

The Food Safety Field Worksheet is contained in Document 3. The Training Agent administers it during production and retains the completed worksheet as part of the section record. A completed and satisfactory Food Safety Field Worksheet is a prerequisite for the written examination in applicable sections.

The Written Examination

The written examination is a 50-question assessment administered by the Training Agent after the OJT Competency Verification is complete and required reading is certified. The passing standard for all written examinations in this program is 80%. See Chapter 6 for the full examination administration requirements.

Three Conditions Before the Examination

All three of the following conditions must be satisfied before the written examination is administered. There are no exceptions.

9. OJT Competency Verification is complete with a minimum score of 2 in every competency category.
10. The apprentice has certified completion of all required readings listed in Section 5 of the Apprentice Curriculum for this section.
11. The Food Safety Field Worksheet is complete for sections where it applies.

Examination Administration

The written examination is administered in a controlled setting, separate from the production floor. The apprentice completes it independently — no notes, no reference materials, no access to the Apprentice Curriculum. The Training Agent is present to ensure examination integrity. The examination is not timed beyond the general expectation that it be completed in a single sitting.

Failed Examinations

An apprentice who scores below 80% may not advance to the next section. The Training Agent identifies the specific areas of deficiency, provides additional floor time and study time focused on those areas, and re-administers the examination after a minimum of one week. There is no limit on re-attempts. Every attempt — including failed attempts — must be documented with the date, score, and corrective action taken.

The Pounds-Per-Hour Production Standard

In addition to the three-instrument assessment process, Journeyman certification requires demonstration of the program's minimum production efficiency standard. This standard is applied at the completion of Phase 2 and is the final competency threshold before the Journeyman credential is issued.

The minimum pounds-per-hour benchmarks defined in Phase 2 Section 6 are the certification floor. They are not guidelines. An apprentice who cannot consistently meet the minimum production rate for the applicable product types at their facility has not demonstrated journey-level competency — regardless of hours accumulated, competency verification scores, or examination results.

Applicable Products Only

The pounds-per-hour standard applies only to product types the facility actually produces. A retail shop that does not conduct harvest operations is not evaluated against harvest benchmarks. A facility that does not run a fresh sausage program is not evaluated against sausage production benchmarks. The standard is applied to the production programs relevant to the Training Agent's facility.

The Training Agent Sets the Floor

The program minimum is the floor. The Training Agent may establish a higher facility-specific standard based on their operation's equipment, workflow, and production requirements. A Training Agent may not certify an apprentice who has not met the program minimum. A Training Agent may withhold certification from an apprentice who meets the program minimum but does not meet the facility's higher standard — this is within the Training Agent's authority as the competency certifier.

Category	Task	Minimum (lb/hr unless noted)
Harvest	Beef harvest line (kill floor operations)	150 lb/hr
Harvest	Pork harvest	200 lb/hr
Beef fabrication	Primal to subprimal breakdown	80 lb/hr
Beef fabrication	Boneless program (ribeye roll, striploin)	50 lb/hr
Beef fabrication	Bone-in steak program	80 lb/hr
Pork fabrication	Loin boneless chop program	60 lb/hr
Pork fabrication	Loin bone-in chop program	80 lb/hr
Pork fabrication	Shoulder boneless butt	50 lb/hr
Lamb fabrication	Rack frenching program	20 lb/hr
Lamb fabrication	Rack rib chop program	40 lb/hr
Lamb fabrication	Leg boneless program	35 lb/hr
Poultry fabrication	Full bird breakdown to bone-in parts	80 lb/hr
Poultry fabrication	Boneless skinless breast program	40 lb/hr
Sausage & value-added	Grinding and mixing (raw to ground blend)	150 lb/hr
Sausage & value-added	Sausage stuffing and linking (fresh)	80 lb/hr

Category	Task	Minimum (lb/hr unless noted)
Sausage & value-added	Patty forming and packaging	100 lb/hr
Sausage & value-added	Cured and smoked programs (active prep, not hold time)	60 lb/hr
Packaging & labeling	Weigh, wrap, and label (retail tray)	60 units/hr
Packaging & labeling	Case-ready packaging operations	80 lb/hr

Section Certification

When all section requirements are satisfied — OJT hours met, all competency categories scored 2 or above, required reading certified, Food Safety Field Worksheet complete where applicable, and written examination passed at 80% or above — the Training Agent completes and signs the Section Certification for that section.

The Section Certification is submitted to the Apprenticeship Training Director. It is the formal record that the apprentice has satisfied all requirements for that section. RAPIDS is updated to reflect the section completion. The Training Agent retains copies of all supporting records — competency verification, examination, field worksheet, and required reading certification — as part of the section file.

Section Certification Requires Training Agent Signature

The Training Agent's signature on the Section Certification is their professional attestation that the apprentice has met every requirement for that section. It is not a formality. It is the act of certification. Sign it only when you are confident the apprentice has genuinely met the standard — not because the paperwork is in order.

CHAPTER 8

WAGE PROGRESSION SCHEDULE

This chapter defines the wage progression schedule for the NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program. Wages advance based on phase completion combined with the OJT hour minimum for that phase. When an apprentice completes a phase milestone, their wage advances to the next step. The Training Agent is responsible for implementing wage increases when milestones are reached and for reporting wages to the Apprenticeship Training Director by the 10th of each month.

How Wage Progression Works

The NWMPA program uses a phase-completion wage progression model under the Hybrid approach (29 CFR 29.5(b)(2)(iii)). Wage advancement requires both the OJT hour minimum for the phase AND verified completion of every section in that phase. Step 1 (67%) covers Phase 1 (0–1,900 hours). Step 2 (85%) applies through Phase 2 (1,900–4,000 hours). Journey-level (100%) is earned only at completion of Phase 2 Section 7 — the capstone — and the full 4,000 hours.

This model is intentional. It connects compensation directly to demonstrated competency. An apprentice who develops skills quickly and completes sections efficiently can advance in wage faster than the estimated program duration. An apprentice who requires more time to reach the competency standard completes sections when they are genuinely ready — and their wage advances at that point, not before.

Training Agent Authority on Wages

The wage schedule defines the program minimum at each step. The Training Agent determines the actual wage paid to each apprentice, which may be at or above the program minimum. The Training Agent may pay more than the program minimum at any step. The Training Agent may not pay less than the program minimum for the apprentice's current step. The state and local minimum wage floor applies at all times.

The Wage Schedule

Step / Period	Minimum OJT Hours	Course Completions & Certifications Required for Step Advancement	% of Journeyworker Wage
Step 1	0 – 1,900 hours	Phase 1 Curriculum: Sections 1–8; NWMPA Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations	67%

Step / Period	Minimum OJT Hours	Course Completions & Certifications Required for Step Advancement	% of Journeyworker Wage
Step 2	1,900 – 4,000 hours	Phase 2 Curriculum: Sections 1–7; NWMPA Certificate in Advanced Processing & Production	85%
Upon Completion	4,000 total hours	Issuance of NWMPA Journeyperson Certificate and USDOL Completion Certificate	100%

Journey Level Is Earned at Section 7 Completion Only

The 100% journey-level wage is earned exclusively upon successful completion of Phase 2 Section 7 — Food Safety Systems / HACCP. Step 2 of the wage schedule (85% of the applicable journeyworker wage) applies throughout Phase 2 until Section 7 is complete and the program is finished. Journey level is the capstone milestone and is treated as such.

Journey-Level Wage Rates by State and County

NWMPA establishes minimum journeyworker wage rates by county for each authorized state — Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah — set forth in the schedules below. The applicable rate is determined by the county in which the apprentice's primary work location is situated. Each Training Agent must pay at or above the NWMPA minimum for that county; a Training Agent may elect to pay above the minimum based on local labor-market conditions. The percentage steps in the apprentice wage schedule (67%, 85%, 100%) apply uniformly across all Training Agents and are calculated against the applicable journeyworker wage. NWMPA reviews these minimum journeyworker wage rates annually at the June meeting of the Board of Directors. Updated rates are communicated to all active Training Agents in writing and take effect on the date specified in the notice.

Washington

County Group	Counties	Journey-Level Wage
Metro / West	Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor, Mason, Kitsap, Thurston, Pacific, Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Clark, Skamania, Pierce, King, Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom	\$25.00/hr
East / Rural	Okanogan, Chelan, Kittitas, Yakima, Klickitat, Benton, Grant, Douglas, Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Spokane, Adams, Whitman, Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, Asotin	\$22.00/hr

Oregon

County Group	Counties	Journey-Level Wage
Metro	Washington, Multnomah, Clackamas, Marion, Yamhill, Polk, Benton, Linn	\$25.00/hr
Rural	Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Baker, Grant, Wheeler, Jefferson, Deschutes, Crook, Malheur, Harney, Lake, Klamath, Jackson, Josephine, Curry, Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, Lincoln, Lane, Douglas, Coos	\$18.00/hr

Idaho

County Group	Counties	Journey-Level Wage
Metro	Canyon, Ada, Elmore, Camas, Blaine, Owyhee, Gooding, Twin Falls, Lincoln, Jerome, Minidoka, Cassia, Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Shoshone	\$25.00/hr
Rural	Benewah, Latah, Nez Perce, Clearwater, Lewis, Idaho, Adams, Washington, Payette, Gem, Valley, Boise, Custer, Lemhi, Butte, Clark, Jefferson, Fremont, Madison, Teton, Bingham, Bonneville, Power, Bannock, Caribou, Oneida, Franklin, Bear Lake	\$16.25/hr

Utah

County Group	Counties	Journey-Level Wage
Metro	Cache, Salt Lake, Summit, Uintah, Utah, Wasatch, Weber	\$22.00/hr
Rural	Carbon, Davis, Duchesne, Emery, Garfield, Iron, Juab, Kane, Millard, Morgan, Piute, Rich, San Juan, Sanpete, Sevier, Tooele, Uintah, Washington, Wayne	\$18.00/hr

The State Minimum Wage Floor Clause

The program minimum wage at any step is always the higher of the calculated step percentage or the applicable state or local minimum wage. Where the calculated step percentage produces a wage below

the applicable state or local minimum wage, the Training Agent must pay the higher minimum wage rate. The step percentage does not change — only the floor applies.

Washington and Oregon Rural Counties — Floor Applies at Entry

At the 67% entry step, the calculated wage for Washington rural counties (\$14.74/hr) and Oregon rural counties (\$12.06/hr) falls below those states' applicable minimum wages. Training Agents in these counties must pay the applicable state minimum wage at the entry step. The 67% step percentage remains unchanged — the state minimum wage is simply the effective floor until the calculated percentage exceeds it.

Washington's state minimum wage increases annually. The NWMPA Board of Directors reviews and updates the journeyworker wage rates and floor calculations each year at the June Board meeting. Training Agents are notified of any updates to the wage schedule. This program will never permit an apprentice wage below the applicable state or local minimum wage at any step.

Wage Reporting

Training Agents are required to report the wages paid to each apprentice to the Apprenticeship Training Director on a monthly basis. Monthly wage reporting is a program compliance requirement. Failure to report wages monthly may result in disciplinary action by the Board of Directors per Chapter 11.

Wage reports must reflect the apprentice's current step and the actual hourly wage paid. If a Training Agent is paying above the program minimum — which is encouraged where the local labor market warrants it — the actual wage paid should be reported, not the program minimum.

Journey-Level Wage Rate Reviews

The NWMPA Board of Directors reviews journeyworker wage rates annually at the June Board meeting. Rate adjustments are made based on changes in state minimum wages, regional labor market conditions, and industry standards. When journey-level wage rates are updated, the new rates apply to all active apprentices from the effective date of the update. Training Agents are notified in writing of any rate changes and are expected to implement updated rates for all active apprentices promptly.

The percentage steps in the wage schedule — 67%, 85%, 100% — do not change when journey-level rates are updated. Only the dollar amounts change as the journey-level rate is adjusted.

Fringe Benefits

The wage schedule does not account for fringe benefits. A Training Agent may provide medical benefits, retirement contributions, paid time off, or other benefits in addition to wages. These benefits

are not factored into the wage step calculations and are entirely at the Training Agent's discretion. Benefits provided are not counted as wages for the purpose of this wage schedule.

CHAPTER 9**TRAINING AGENT EXPECTATIONS AND OBLIGATIONS**

This chapter is written for Training Agents. It defines what the program expects of you from the day you apply through the day your last apprentice earns their credential. Read it before you enroll your first apprentice. Refer to it throughout the program.

Who a Training Agent Is

A Training Agent in the NWMPA program is typically the owner or manager of a USDA-inspected, state-inspected, custom exempt, or retail butcher shop facility. You are an experienced meat cutter who knows the craft. You do not need to be a licensed HACCP professional, a certified educator, or a regulatory expert to be a Training Agent. You need to know the production environment, be willing to structure your facility around training, and commit to the documentation requirements the program and DOL registration require.

You are not a lecturer. You are a floor facilitator. Your job is to use daily production situations as opportunities to build and test competency. The apprentice learns by doing the work and by explaining what they are doing and why. You create the conditions for that learning, observe the work, ask the questions, and make the final determination of whether the apprentice has met the standard.

Becoming a Training Agent

Application and Qualification

To become an approved Training Agent, a facility must complete the Training Agent application and submit it to the Apprenticeship Training Director. The application is available through NWMPA's offices or at www.nwmpa.com. The Training Director will acknowledge receipt within 72 hours and allow up to two weeks to process the application.

Once basic requirements are confirmed, the Training Director will schedule a consultation — by phone, video conference, or in-person visit — to evaluate the facility's qualifications, operational scope, training goals, and fit with the program. Approval as a Training Agent is at the sole discretion of the NWMPA Board of Directors.

Training Agent Qualification Examination

Before being approved as a Training Agent, the facility owner or designated training manager must pass the NWMPA Training Agent Qualification Examination. This examination covers program structure, the three-document delivery system, OJT and RTI requirements, competency verification and assessment administration, document security, conditional section protocols, and DOL compliance obligations.

The examination consists of 50 written questions and 5 scenario-based judgment assessments. The passing standard is 80%. The examination is administered by the Apprenticeship Training Director and must be completed independently without reference to program materials. Training Agents who do not pass on the first attempt may re-attempt after a minimum waiting period determined by the Training Director.

Why the Qualification Examination Exists

The Training Agent Qualification Examination exists because the quality of the apprentice's training depends entirely on the Training Agent's understanding of the program. A Training Agent who does not understand the assessment system, the document security requirements, or the conditional section protocols cannot deliver the program correctly. The examination confirms that every approved Training Agent starts from the same baseline of program knowledge.

License Agreement

Approved Training Agents execute a License Agreement with Tracy Smaciarz as curriculum owner, governing the use of the NWMPA curriculum materials. The License Agreement defines the terms under which the Training Agent may use the Apprentice Curriculum, Training Agent Manuals, and Assessment Packages in their facility. Training Agents must hold a current, valid License Agreement to participate in the program. The License Agreement must be in place and the Training Agent must be registered with DOL before curriculum access is granted and before any apprentice may be enrolled.

DOL Registration Requirement

Every Training Agent must be registered with the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship as a participating employer in the NWMPA program before any apprentice is enrolled. DOL registration is a federal requirement under 29 CFR Part 29. The program is registered under O*NET-SOC code 51-3021.00 (All-Round Butcher / MEAT CUTTER), RAPIDS Code 0316HY. The Washington state registration is 2026-WA-141357; registrations in Oregon, Idaho, and Utah follow under the same Standards. The Training Director coordinates the registration process. Training Agents must provide proof of registration before curriculum materials are distributed and before an apprentice's enrollment is finalized in RAPIDS.

Your Three Core Responsibilities

Responsibility	What It Requires
Deliver Instruction	Facilitate each section using the Training Agent Manual. Assign production tasks that develop the competencies in the curriculum. Use the facilitation guide's five-panel format — Topic Header, Before Production, During Production, What to Look For, Regulatory Anchor — to structure your training shifts. Use discussion questions to test understanding in real time on the floor. You are bringing the curriculum to life through production — not lecturing from it.
Verify Competency	Observe the apprentice's work against the competency standards in the OJT Competency Verification form. Score honestly using the 0–3 scale as competency is demonstrated during production. Do not advance the apprentice to examination until every competency category scores a 2 or above. You are the final authority on whether the apprentice has met the standard.
Administer Assessments	Manage Document 3 — the Assessment and Administration Package — securely at all times. Confirm required reading completion before administering the written examination. Administer the examination in a controlled setting. Complete all records accurately. Submit Section Certifications to the Training Director. Retain all section records for five years minimum.

RTI Delivery Responsibilities

As a Training Agent, you are the RTI delivery mechanism for this program. RTI is not delivered by a university or an external institution — it is delivered through the program's Apprentice Curriculum, required reading, and Learning Checkpoints, all of which the apprentice completes on their own time. Your role in RTI delivery is to:

- Give the apprentice their copy of the Apprentice Curriculum at the start of each section and direct them to the Required Reading section.
- Make clear that required reading must be completed before the written examination is administered.
- Use the discussion questions in the Apprentice Curriculum to engage with the apprentice's reading on the production floor.
- Confirm that the apprentice has completed the Learning Checkpoint for each topic before facilitating the Discussion Questions for that topic.
- Certify required reading completion before administering the written examination.
- Report RTI hours completed by the apprentice each week in the tracking log.

You do not supervise or direct the apprentice's RTI time. You do not pay for it. You do not schedule it. Your role is to confirm it happened and to use the production floor to connect the reading to real work.

Reporting Requirements

Training Agents have four ongoing reporting obligations throughout the program. All reporting is submitted to the Apprenticeship Training Director.

Report	Frequency	What to Report
OJT and RTI Hours	Weekly log / 10th of month	Training Agent logs hours by section topic each week in the shared tracking log for accuracy. A complete monthly summary is submitted to the Apprenticeship Training Director by the 10th of each month. Hours may not be reconstructed after the fact.
Wage Report	Monthly	Actual hourly wage paid to each active apprentice. Must reflect current wage step. Report actual wage paid, not program minimum.
Enrollment Changes	Within 15 days of change	New enrollments, transfers in, transfers out, withdrawals, terminations, suspensions. Each change triggers a RAPIDS update.
Section Certifications	Upon section completion	Signed Section Certification for each completed section, submitted to the Training Director with copies of all supporting records.

Failure to Report Has Consequences

Failure to submit required reports in a timely manner is a program compliance violation. Repeated reporting failures may result in disciplinary action by the Board of Directors, including suspension or termination of Training Agent status. Hours that are not reported do not exist in the official record — and cannot be reconstructed to the apprentice's benefit after the fact.

Record Retention

Training Agents must retain complete records for every section completed by every apprentice trained at their facility. The minimum retention period is five years from the date of the section certification. Records must be retained regardless of whether the apprentice completed the program, withdrew, was terminated, or transferred to another facility.

At a minimum, the following records must be retained for each completed section:

- Completed OJT Competency Verification form with scores, dates, and Training Agent signature
- Completed Food Safety Field Worksheet where applicable
- Completed written examination with apprentice name, date, and score
- Documentation of any failed examination attempts including date, score, and corrective action taken
- Topic Completion Tracker with dates and initials
- Required reading certification confirmation
- Signed Section Certification

Records may be maintained in paper or electronic format. If maintained electronically, records must be backed up and retrievable for the full five-year retention period. DOL may request access to program records at any time. Records must be available within 10 business days of any DOL or program administration request.

Safety and Workers' Compensation

Apprentices work in a meat processing environment that involves knives, saws, grinders, slippery surfaces, cold temperatures, and powered equipment. As a Training Agent and employer, you are responsible for maintaining a safe working environment that meets the requirements of your state's occupational safety regulations and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) General Duty Clause (29 U.S.C. § 654).

Workers' compensation coverage for apprentices is governed by the individual state's requirements where the facility is located. Coverage is a matter between the Training Agent and the apprentice as employer and employee. Contact your state's labor department or workers' compensation authority for the specific requirements that apply to your facility and your apprenticeship arrangement.

The 1:1 apprentice-to-journeyworker ratio required by this program serves a safety function as well as a training function. A qualified journey-level worker present for each apprentice means there is always someone positioned to intervene if a safety issue arises during production. Maintain the ratio. It protects the apprentice, protects your facility, and protects you.

What Training Agents Are Not Expected to Be

You are not expected to have formal HACCP certification, a food science degree, or prior experience running a registered apprenticeship program. You are expected to know your production environment, apply the facilitation tools provided in the Training Agent Manual for each section, hold the apprentice to the program's competency standards, and maintain the documentation the program requires.

The program is designed so that a working shop owner or manager can deliver it without stopping production. The Training Agent Manual for each section tells you exactly what to prepare before the shift, what to observe during production, what questions to ask, and what competency looks like when it has been genuinely achieved. You bring the trade knowledge. The program provides the structure.

The Dual Development Principle

Working through this program as a Training Agent will make you a better operator. The facilitation process — walking through regulatory frameworks, competency standards, food safety field documentation, and production efficiency benchmarks section by section — sharpens your own operational discipline. Training agents who engage seriously with the program consistently report improved yield tracking, stronger sanitation discipline, and a clearer picture of their facility's financial performance. This is not coincidental. It is a design feature of how the program was built.

CHAPTER 10

GRANTING HOURS AND ADVANCED STANDING

This chapter applies to both apprentices and Training Agents. It defines when and how prior experience can be credited toward the program's hour requirements, and how that credit affects the probationary period and wage progression.

What Granting Hours Means

The program is built around on-the-job training hours accumulated during active enrollment. In most cases, apprentices begin at Step 1 and work through the full program from the start. However, some individuals enter the program with documented prior experience in one or more areas covered by the curriculum. Where that experience is verifiable and relevant, the Training Agent may apply to grant hours — crediting prior experience toward section minimums.

Hour grants are not automatic. They require a formal application, Training Director review, and Board of Directors approval. The Board's decision is final. No credit is applied until the application is approved and confirmed in writing by the Training Director.

Granting Hours Is a Board Decision

The Training Agent may identify candidates for hour grants and submit the application, but the determination of whether hours are granted — and how many — rests entirely with the NWMPA Board of Directors. The Training Director can advise on likely eligibility but cannot pre-approve grants. Do not represent to an apprentice that hours will be granted until the Board has made its decision in writing.

Eligible Prior Experience

Prior experience that may qualify for hour grants includes documented work in a meat processing or butcher shop environment that directly corresponds to the competencies covered in one or more program sections. Examples include:

- Prior employment as a meat cutter, butcher, or processing floor worker at a USDA-inspected, state-inspected, custom exempt, or retail butcher shop facility
- Documented experience in species-specific fabrication, harvest operations, sausage production, or food safety systems
- Military food service experience involving meat cutting or processing
- Vocational or technical training in meat cutting or food science with documented hours and competency verification

Prior experience must be documented. Undocumented experience — regardless of how extensive — cannot be credited. Documentation may include prior employment records, pay stubs, employer letters, training certificates, or other verifiable evidence of the experience claimed.

Applying for Hour Grants

The Training Agent submits the Application for Granting Hours to the Apprenticeship Training Director. The application must include:

12. The apprentice's name and enrollment information
13. Documentation of the prior experience supporting the request
14. A brief explanation of why the prior experience is relevant to the specific section competencies
15. The specific program sections for which hours are being requested
16. The number of hours requested per section

The Training Director submits the completed application to the Board of Directors for review. The Board evaluates the application at their next meeting and notifies the Training Agent of their decision in writing. Approved grants are recorded in the official program record and reflected in the apprentice's file.

Related Technical Instruction Credit

An apprentice with documented prior training in areas covered by the program's related technical instruction component — such as completion of relevant coursework, food safety certifications, or industry training programs — may also apply for credit toward the program's instruction hour requirements. This credit is subject to the same application and Board approval process as on-the-job training hour grants.

Instruction credit does not reduce the apprentice's obligation to complete the required reading for each section before the written examination is administered. Required reading is section-specific and tied directly to examination content. Prior general training does not substitute for section-specific required reading.

Effect on the Probationary Period

The 1,000-hour probationary period is not reduced by the granting of advanced standing or prior-experience credit. Per 29 CFR 29.5(b)(8) and the program's registered Standards, the initial probationary period is served in full from the date of program enrollment regardless of any hour grant approved by the Board. Granted hours apply only to section minimums and the 4,000-hour program total — they do not shorten probation.

Effect on Wage Progression

Granted hours count toward the OJT hour minimums for the corresponding sections and toward the phase totals that trigger wage step advancement. If a grant brings the apprentice across a phase boundary (Phase 1 → Phase 2 at 1,900 hours, or Phase 2 → completion at 4,000 hours), and the Board confirms that the prior experience demonstrates competency equivalent to all sections in that phase, the apprentice may advance in wage step accordingly.

Wage step advancement based on granted hours requires the same Board approval as the hour grant itself. The Training Agent may not advance an apprentice's wage step based on a pending or informal grant. Wage step changes take effect only after written Board approval is received and confirmed by the Training Director.

CHAPTER 11

DISCIPLINARY AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

This chapter defines the disciplinary procedures that apply to apprentices and Training Agents, the grievance process available to apprentices, the due process protections that govern all disciplinary actions, and the procedures for program suspension and cancellation. All disciplinary actions taken under this chapter are administered by the NWMPA Board of Directors and communicated in writing.

Disciplinary Actions — Apprentices

An apprentice may be subject to disciplinary action for any of the following:

- Failure to complete required reading or related technical instruction at a reasonable pace
- Failure to maintain satisfactory progress toward section competency standards
- Failure to comply with program requirements as defined in this handbook
- Conduct that reflects adversely on the apprentice's fitness for the trade
- Falsification of program records, hour logs, or examination materials
- Breach of any Non-Disclosure Agreement signed in connection with an alternate Training Agent placement

Disciplinary actions available against an apprentice include:

- **Written warning:** Formal written notice of the deficiency and the corrective action required.
- **Wage freeze:** Suspension of wage progression at the current step until the deficiency is corrected. The apprentice continues to work and accumulate hours during a wage freeze.
- **Probationary extension:** Extension of the probationary period where the apprentice has not demonstrated satisfactory progress.
- **Program suspension:** Temporary removal from active program status. The apprentice may not accumulate hours during suspension.
- **Program cancellation:** Permanent removal from the program. The apprentice does not receive a credential for incomplete phases.

Disciplinary Actions — Training Agents

A Training Agent may be subject to disciplinary action for any of the following:

- Failure to submit required reports — hours, wages, enrollment changes, or section certifications — in a timely manner
- Failure to maintain the required 1:1 apprentice-to-journeyworker ratio

- Failure to maintain document security for the Assessment and Administration Package
- Administering the written examination before all prerequisite conditions are met
- Certifying an apprentice who has not met the program's competency standards
- Violation of the License Agreement terms
- Failure to maintain registration as a participating employer with the Department of Labor
- Retaliation against an apprentice who files a complaint

Disciplinary actions available against a Training Agent include:

- **Written warning:** Formal written notice of the violation and required corrective action.
- **Corrective action plan:** Defined steps and timeline for bringing the Training Agent into compliance.
- **Suspension of enrollment privileges:** Temporary prohibition on enrolling new apprentices while existing apprentices continue their programs.
- **Training Agent status suspension:** Temporary removal of Training Agent approval. Active apprentices are transferred to approved facilities.
- **Training Agent status termination:** Permanent revocation of Training Agent approval and License Agreement termination. Active apprentices are transferred.

Due Process Protections

All disciplinary actions in this program — against apprentices and Training Agents alike — are subject to the following due process protections.

Written Notice

No disciplinary action beyond a verbal warning may be taken without prior written notice to the party being disciplined. Written notice must identify the specific conduct or deficiency at issue, reference the program requirement that has not been met, and state the proposed disciplinary action.

Response Period

Upon receipt of written notice, the party has 15 calendar days to respond in writing to the Apprenticeship Training Director. The response may dispute the facts, provide context, or propose an alternative corrective action. The Training Director will present the response to the Board of Directors for consideration before a final disciplinary decision is made.

Board Decision

The Board of Directors makes the final disciplinary determination. The Board's decision is communicated in writing to the affected party within 10 business days of the Board's review. The

Board's decision is final and takes effect immediately upon notification unless a specific effective date is stated in the decision letter.

Immediate Action for Serious Violations

Where a violation poses an immediate risk to program integrity, document security, apprentice safety, or Department of Labor compliance — including confirmed examination compromise, falsification of records, or failure to maintain federal registration — the Training Director may take immediate protective action without the standard notice and response period. Immediate action is reported to the Board at their next meeting and is subject to Board ratification.

Apprentice Grievance Procedure

Any apprentice who believes they have been subjected to an unjust disciplinary action, denied a right defined in this handbook, or otherwise treated unfairly in connection with the program may file a formal grievance. The grievance procedure is available to all apprentices who have completed the probationary period.

Filing a Grievance

Grievances must be submitted in writing to the Apprenticeship Training Director within 30 calendar days of the incident or action giving rise to the grievance. Grievances may be submitted by mail or email. The written grievance must describe the incident or action, identify the specific program right or requirement at issue, and state the remedy the apprentice is seeking.

Grievance Review

The Training Director will acknowledge receipt of the grievance within 5 business days and will present the grievance to the Board of Directors at their next scheduled meeting. The Training Agent whose apprentice filed the grievance will be notified and given the opportunity to provide a written response to the Board before the grievance is reviewed. The Board will issue a written decision within 10 business days of their review.

Grievance Outcomes

The Board may uphold the grievance, deny the grievance, or order a specific corrective action. The Board's decision is final within the program. An apprentice who is not satisfied with the program's grievance outcome may contact the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship for further review of any matter relating to federal apprenticeship standards.

Retaliation Against a Grievance Filer Is Prohibited

A Training Agent who retaliates against an apprentice for filing a grievance — through termination, wage reduction, adverse working conditions, or any other adverse action — is subject to immediate disciplinary action including termination of Training Agent status. Retaliation is a serious program violation and a potential federal compliance issue.

Program Suspension and Cancellation

Suspension

A program suspension temporarily removes the apprentice from active status. The apprentice may not accumulate training or instruction hours during suspension. Wages during suspension are a matter between the apprentice and the Training Agent as employer. A suspended apprentice retains their accumulated hours and completed section certifications and may be reinstated to active status when the grounds for suspension are resolved.

Suspension requires written Board authorization except in the case of immediate action per the due process provisions above. The suspension letter must state the reason for suspension, the conditions for reinstatement, and the expected timeline.

Cancellation

Program cancellation permanently ends an apprentice's enrollment. A cancelled apprentice does not receive a credential for incomplete phases. If the apprentice has completed Phase 1 before cancellation, the NWMPA Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations is retained — it is not revoked by cancellation from Phase 2.

Cancellation requires written Board authorization. The cancellation letter must state the grounds for cancellation. The apprentice's program record is updated to reflect the cancellation. The Training Director notifies the Department of Labor of the cancellation as required by federal apprenticeship regulations.

Reinstatement After Cancellation

A cancelled apprentice may apply for reinstatement to the program. Reinstatement applications are reviewed by the Board of Directors on a case-by-case basis. Reinstatement is not guaranteed and is at the Board's sole discretion. A reinstated apprentice begins a new probationary period from the point of reinstatement.

CHAPTER 12

PROGRAM COMPLETION AND JOURNEYMAN CERTIFICATION

This chapter defines what program completion means, what happens when an apprentice finishes Phase 1 or Phase 2, how credentials are issued, and what the Journeyman Meat Cutter credential represents. This chapter applies to both apprentices and Training Agents.

Phase 1 Completion — Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations

An apprentice completes Phase 1 when all of the following are satisfied across all eight Phase 1 sections, subject to conditional exceptions for Section 7:

17. Minimum on-the-job training hours for each applicable section have been accumulated and logged.
18. All section competency verifications are complete with a minimum score of 2 in every category.
19. All required readings have been certified for each section.
20. All food safety field worksheets are complete for applicable sections.
21. All written examinations have been passed at 80% or above.
22. All Section Certifications have been signed by the Training Agent and submitted to the Training Director.
23. The Training Agent has confirmed that the apprentice meets the program's production efficiency expectations for the applicable product types at their facility.

Upon confirmation of Phase 1 completion, the Apprenticeship Training Director issues the NWMPA Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations to the apprentice. The certificate is issued by NWMPA and signed by the Apprenticeship Training Director and the NWMPA Executive Director. The apprentice's program record is updated to reflect Phase 1 completion.

The Phase 1 Certificate Is a Real Credential

The NWMPA Certificate in Meat Cutting / Custom & Retail Operations is not a participation award or an interim document. It is a standalone credential that documents verified competency in the foundational skills of professional meat cutting. It is earned. It is issued by a federally registered apprenticeship sponsor. It is meaningful to employers in this industry. An apprentice who stops at Phase 1 leaves the program with something of genuine professional value.

Phase 2 Completion — Journey-Level Certification in Meat Cutting / Advanced Processing & Production

An apprentice completes Phase 2 when all of the following are satisfied across all seven Phase 2 sections, subject to conditional exceptions for Section 1:

24. Minimum on-the-job training hours for each applicable section have been accumulated and logged.
25. All section competency verifications are complete with a minimum score of 2 in every category.
26. All required readings have been certified for each section.
27. All food safety field worksheets are complete for applicable sections.
28. All written examinations have been passed at 80% or above.
29. Phase 2 Section 7 — Food Safety Systems / Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points — has been completed and certified. This is the capstone requirement.
30. All Section Certifications have been signed by the Training Agent and submitted to the Training Director.
31. The Training Agent has confirmed in writing that the apprentice consistently meets the minimum pounds-per-hour production benchmarks for all applicable product types at the facility.

The Production Efficiency Confirmation

Before the Journey-Level Certification is issued, the Training Agent must formally confirm in writing that the apprentice meets the minimum pounds-per-hour production standard for all product types applicable to their facility. This confirmation is made as part of the final Phase 2 Section 7 certification process.

The program minimum is the floor. The Training Agent may set a higher facility-specific standard. A Training Agent may not certify an apprentice who has not met the program minimum. A Training Agent may withhold certification from an apprentice who meets the program minimum but does not meet the facility's higher standard — this is within the Training Agent's authority as the competency certifier.

Training Agent Authority at Journeyman Certification

The Training Agent is the final authority on Journeyman certification. Meeting all Phase 2 completion conditions is necessary — it is not always sufficient. If the Training Agent has a genuine, documented concern about an apprentice's readiness for journey-level certification despite meeting the technical requirements, they should raise that concern with the Apprenticeship Training Director before the final Section Certification is submitted. The Training Agent's professional judgment is the last line of quality assurance in this program.

Issuance of the Journey-Level Credential

Upon confirmation of Phase 2 completion — including the Training Agent's written production efficiency confirmation — the following credentials are issued:

- **NWMPA Journey-Level Certification in Meat Cutting / Advanced Processing & Production:** Issued by NWMPA and signed by the Apprenticeship Training Director and the NWMPA Executive Director. This is the program's own credential documenting completion of the full two-phase apprenticeship.
- **U.S. Department of Labor Journeyman Meat Cutter Credential:** Initiated through the federal registration system upon program completion. The credential is issued under O*NET-SOC code 51-3021.00 (All-Round Butcher / MEAT CUTTER), covering the full scope of competency the program develops — from retail fabrication through harvest, sausage production, curing, and food safety systems. The DOL credential is nationally recognized, federally registered, and belongs to the apprentice permanently — no renewal, no expiration.

The Journeyman Meat Cutter credential issued through the U.S. Department of Labor is recognized nationally. It tells an employer anywhere in the country that the holder has been trained, assessed, and verified as competent against a federal standard. It opens doors. It justifies compensation. It is the credential that defines a career in this trade.

HACCP Certification Is a Separate, Accredited Pathway

The Journey-Level Certification and the U.S. Department of Labor Journeyman Meat Cutter credential issued at program completion do not include or substitute for HACCP certification. The program builds the working understanding of HACCP that any meat industry professional needs — sanitation, monitoring, corrective action, documentation, and operating within a HACCP system — but formal HACCP certification requires completion of an accredited HACCP training course offered by external providers such as IHA, AFDO, or AAMP. Apprentices who complete this program are well-prepared to pursue that accredited certification when their employer requires it.

Portability of the Credential

Both the Phase 1 certificate and the Phase 2 Journey-Level certification are portable. They are earned by the individual apprentice and follow them throughout their career regardless of where they work after completing the program. The credentials are not tied to the Training Agent facility, to NWMPA membership, or to any particular state. An apprentice who earns the Journeyman Meat Cutter credential in Washington and subsequently works in Texas or Florida carries that credential with them.

Program Completion and the Federal Record

Upon completion of the program, the Training Director submits the final completion documentation to the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship. The federal record is updated to reflect program

completion. The apprentice receives written confirmation of their federal registration status and credential issuance. The Training Director retains all program completion records for the required retention period.

CHAPTER 13

AGREEMENTS AND SIGNATURES

This chapter identifies the formal agreements that govern participation in the NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program. Both the Apprentice Agreement and the Training Agent Agreement are standalone documents distributed as part of the NWMPA Program Agreements package. Both agreements must be signed before enrollment is finalized. The full acknowledgment text, fill-in fields, signature blocks, and Training Director use-only sections are contained in the standalone agreement documents. The content of each agreement is summarized below for reference.

Apprentice Agreement

I, the undersigned apprentice, confirm the following:

32. I have read the NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program Handbook in its entirety and understand the requirements, expectations, and procedures it contains.
33. I meet the minimum qualifications for program enrollment — I am 18 years of age or older, I hold a high school diploma or equivalent, and I am able to meet the physical demands of the meat processing environment with or without reasonable accommodation.
34. I am employed by an NWMPA-approved Training Agent and understand that enrollment in this program is contingent on maintaining that employment or transferring to another approved Training Agent.
35. I understand that on-the-job training hours are earned through real production work and that I am responsible for maintaining my own personal copy of all program records throughout my participation.
36. I understand that required reading is my responsibility, completed on my own time, and that I must certify completion of required reading to my Training Agent before each written examination is administered.
37. I understand the wage progression schedule and the phase completion milestones that trigger each wage step.
38. I understand the probationary period that applies at the start of my enrollment and the conditions under which it applies.
39. I have also received and read the Apprenticeship Program Standards adopted by the Northwest Meat Processors Association.

Authorized State of Participation (check one): ☐ Washington ☐ Oregon ☐ Idaho ☐ Utah

Apprentice Name (Print)

Date

Apprentice Signature

DOL Registration Number (assigned at enrollment)

Training Agent Facility Name

Training Agent Name (Print)

Training Agent Signature

Date

Training Agent Agreement

I, the undersigned Training Agent, confirm the following:

40. I have read the NWMPA Journeyman Meat Cutter Apprenticeship Program Handbook in its entirety and understand the requirements, expectations, and procedures it contains.

41. My facility is a USDA-inspected, state-inspected, custom exempt, or retail butcher shop facility operating in the authorized state indicated below.

Training Agent Signature

Date

DOL Registration Number

License Agreement Number

Apprenticeship Training Director Signature — NWMPA

Training Director Name (Print)

Date

CHAPTER 14

CONTACT INFORMATION

Direct program-related questions to the appropriate contact listed below. Apprenticeship questions should go to the Apprenticeship Training Director. General NWMPA membership and association inquiries should go to the NWMPA Head Office. Federal registration and compliance questions may be directed to the DOL Office of Apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship Training Director

Name	Tracy Smaciarz
Title	Apprenticeship Training Director
Address	778 SW Chehalis Avenue, Chehalis, WA 98532
Phone	425-341-3248
Email	apprenticeship@nwmpa.com
Role	Direct all apprenticeship program questions, enrollment inquiries, section certification submissions, hour grant applications, grievances, and credential processing to the Training Director.

NWMPA Head Office

Organization	Northwest Meat Processors Association
Address	778 SW Chehalis Ave, Chehalis, WA 98532
Phone	(971) 267-5402
Email	troywilcox@nwmpa.com
Website	www.nwmpa.com
Role	General association inquiries, membership information, Training Agent applications, and NWMPA program information. Not the primary contact for active apprenticeship program questions.

U.S. Department of Labor — Office of Apprenticeship

Office	U.S. Department of Labor — Office of Apprenticeship; Corinna Pereira, State Director; 90 - 7th Street, Suite 17-100, San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone	(702) 388-6772
Website	www.apprenticeship.gov pereira.corinna.j@dol.gov
Role	Federal registration questions, Standards of Apprenticeship inquiries, RAPIDS support, equal opportunity complaints, and any matter relating to federal apprenticeship compliance. The DOL Office of Apprenticeship is the sole registration authority for this program.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Organization	U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Phone	1-800-669-4000
Website	www.eeoc.gov
Role	Discrimination complaints and equal opportunity inquiries outside the scope of the program's internal complaint procedure.

Directing Your Question

If your question is about...	Contact
Enrolling an apprentice, enrollment forms, or RAPIDS registration	Apprenticeship Training Director
Section certifications, hour logs, or program record verification	Apprenticeship Training Director
Hour grant applications or advanced standing requests	Apprenticeship Training Director
Grievances, disciplinary actions, or complaint procedures	Apprenticeship Training Director
Credential issuance or program completion	Apprenticeship Training Director
Training Agent qualification exam or License Agreement	Apprenticeship Training Director

If your question is about...	Contact
NWMPA membership or general association matters	NWMPA Head Office
Federal registration, Standards of Apprenticeship, or RAPIDS	DOL Office of Apprenticeship
Equal opportunity or discrimination complaints	NWMPA Training Director or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)