

Meat Producer Focus Group Meeting Notes- Lancaster 1/10/17

This summary reflects a range of views expressed on the issues as discussed during the focus group meeting of meat producers. They do not reflect the formal or public position of any one group of people, organization or coalition. All errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of EMC.

Attendees: 7 (mix of meat and poultry producers)

One producer commented that all their operations were different and that a one size solution will not work for all operations. As a result, we need to think of the needs of the diverse kinds of operations.

Producers agreed that their cost of production will never be as low as large industrial sized feeding lots in other part of country, nor grass fed meat produced in Australia and New Zealand. The challenges facing NH producers include not enough land base, winter limiting access to pasture, and high cost of feed. As a result, NH's producers can't compete based on price and must differentiate their products.

Some producers raised how access to land was challenging and how it would be difficult to expand their operations without more land. Purchasing land was difficult because of the tight credit market. Leasing land is also challenging because it needs to be a long-term undertaking (ie. 10 years to make it worthwhile) but landowners are hesitant to lease land for that long a term.

All producers had a local customer base. Consumers need to be educated so that they understand the extra value of the product they are purchasing.

Some producers were concerned about all the regulations. If they did not use a USDA inspected processing facility, consumers have to buy the livestock live and then have it processed just for them. The producers noted that having a USDA inspector was costly and added to the price of processing. They wondered whether there could be a special exception for producers who process 10 or fewer animals a year that would allow them to sell individual packages of meat.

Other producers thought that a mobile processing facility would be a good fit because there are so many small producers spread throughout the State. This would address the problem of having high transportation costs. Some small producers also do not own trailers.

One producer suggested onsite slaughter with transferring the hanging meat for processing.

Several producers talked about the challenges selling to supermarkets and restaurants. Restaurants often want a large quantity of a very specific cut and they want it available for an extended period of time. That makes it difficult for the producer since they would have to have another buyer for all the other cuts.

The same producers felt that while supermarkets often showcase local meat, they are not willing to pay a reasonable price. The producers noted that the supermarkets would mark up their meat higher than the standard mark up. It was suggested that supermarkets and institutions need better education on understanding how best to work with and buy from local producers.

One producer suggested that producers need to encourage customers to buy storage freezers.

One producer feared that unless the number of producers expands, NH will lose veterinarians, equipment dealers, feed stores, etc.

Several producers commented that while it's most profitable to have animals processed in the fall, you have to book appointments way in advance to secure a fall appointment. Spring processing appointments were the least favored because winter requires extra feed to prevent the animals from losing weight. The producers felt that they need to communicate with the processing facilities and should not count on fall processing.

Several producers stated that they would be interested in expanding their operations but that marketing was a large challenge. They stated that they had neither the time nor the money required to market effectively. They would like to have professional marketing assistance available to them, preferably with individualized coaching. Producers wondered whether UNH Cooperative Extension or an individual familiar with meat production could provide those services. Producers also would appreciate the ability to access grant money to create marketing materials and designs for their businesses.

One producer suggested exploring a NH brand and have a marketing consultant work on behalf of all meat producers. Ideally, this person would also provide expertise to individual farms.