Livestock Production Discussion Notes
January 27th, 2014 Albemarle Economic Development Conference
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Producers present represent cattle, sheep, goats, and hogs from all across central Virginia.

Beginning with the end in mind: following the discussion and review of notes, these are recommended action steps the Cooperative Extension will follow up with.

- Hosting a meeting on mobile slaughter units with VDACS or with private entities.
- Hosting a general meeting on processing with VDACS or private entities.
- A promise to facilitate this group forward so long as it has momentum, and a trajectory that will result in **producer lead** efforts/action.
- Developing an Albemarle County white paper summary of survey, and meeting notes, that will include recommendations for next steps and potential action items.

Meeting Notes

Discussed 5 topics related to a survey conducted by Albemarle Economic Development, PEC, and VCE.

We asked; what about this topic prevents you, or your fellow producers from succeeding?

Processing

- Lack of clarity in regulations, perception of regulations as burdensome and unclear.
- Lack of Organic Facilities –The only one folks knew of closed/dropped organic designation due to lack of business
- Reasonable distance within county-need capacity-closer!! 20-30 minute drive was offered. Perhaps within an hour?
- Pricing - If processing were closer, and volume of animals high enough audience members theorized costs reducing by about 30% for processing, not to mention fuel and time savings.
- Exemption needed for on farm small farm slaughter and processing, this requires a legislative fix
- Mobile Units-VA (USDA) (tethered to fixed facility) – Interpretation of regulations regarding mobile make barriers. Example, mobile unit would be required to contain a bathroom in the unit (noted by producer)
- USDA vs. State vs. Uninspected – Need clarity on when to use each, and ask if VDACS inspection could be allowed for retail sale just as USDA inspection is.
- Economics of scale – cost of cutting – a possible operations model was discussed
- FAIR animals displace Commercial producers – local fairs call our few facilities and glut them with 4-H/FFA show animals that need to be butchered, causing farms to lose slaughter reservations during “fair time” June-august.
- Forward scheduling/booking –this is about the existing capacity, AND farmers planning ahead or lack thereof.

- Legislative fix needed for Poultry facilities/Mobile Poultry Processing (on farm Processing of others birds - legitimize) –
- Fresh vs. Frozen – product niche. Developing the market for frozen, OR having processing facilities close enough/system set up well enough to take fresh to the retail outlet. Farmers can't sell fresh as the system is set up right now.
- Quality – consistency of cutting among processors
- 2 trips dilemma - Drop live animals off, then return to pick up meat.
- Educate about the need for Meat lockers (at restaurants); given the average restaurant margin this may also be a cost barrier
- Need more value-added capacity, willingness of existing plants to do value added
- Recovery of "odd" cuts (tripe, etc.) for specialty markets – facilities don't return
- On-farm disposal of offal and waste water (regulations/zoning, etc.) – a true regulatory hurdle, the regulations unclear and this involves VDACS, DEQ and local county ordinances.

Scale

- Scale limited by distribution "bottleneck" –parts of the bottleneck include Lack of manpower and funds for one farm to develop their own distribution system. Most operations have 1-3 employees, managing animals, hauling to processing, picking up processed meat, and delivering to end user/farmers market…. Need a "middle man" to do distribution, as local food hub, Relay foods are doing
- Can I succeed as a small producer? Profitability?
- Goal dependency –what does this mean? I HAVE NO IDEA. I don't recall this one. SUE???
- Land Access, adequate land base, contiguous pasture
- Feed vs. pasture costs (land base)
- Zoning flaws, regulations land use taxation qualification – Discussed included problem "up zoning" of land as it is developed around livestock producers and the impact that has on farms. Audience thought more detail on land use laws might help encourage more renting of land for livestock so that production can be expanded. Example was lots of hay being made in Alb. to satisfy land use taxation needs, vs renting for livestock production.
- Fresh vs. frozen product (product turnover… slow on small farms, customer preference)
- Meat Locker as a place to age beef or store it until ready for sale. Freezer capacity on farms is expensive, has risk.

Livestock Management

- Upstream, cattle in streams, stream exclusion
- Invasive species ID and control

- Breeding cycles
- "winter camp" for bulls
- Vaccinations and Medication recommendations (keeping up)
- Organic Management (natural, etc.)
- Certification costs, processing of organic - This relates to the costs of organic certification and organically approved processing of livestock.
- On farm mortality disposal

Forage and Feed Management

- Understanding/ID forages
- System design and yr. round plan (intensive grazing systems)
- Practical fencing, rotational grazing, Farm tours to learn
- Fencing investment (risk)
- Stockpile and Field Stress ($ cost/value of each)
- Parasite Management
- Goat Browse in yr. round grazing
- Misconceptions about rotational grazing and land use…..

Marketing

- Find the niche market
- Fresh vs. frozen market
- Consistency-quality product
- Odd cuts and organs market exist-but need to recover
- Promotion of intangible benefits of local livestock to landscape and region (beyond product attributes) –
- Marketing is "on the upswing", Tell/Sell story
- Farm visit – collective risk of one bad problem
- NEED a local store/restaurant selling 100% locally raised product
- Farmer owned restaurant (only farm products) collective, super stories, everything within 100 miles…
- Raising price/unit with story….

- Capturing more value by farmers (rather than restaurants) - an example is the concept of the farmer owned restaurant/farm store.
- Tastings, kid outreach….. This was more in the line of bringing the family to the farm for events….. Kid friendly events, bounce houses and the like. Wine festivals, food festivals, etc.

Other, "The Back Forty"

- Labor. Finding help, legal issues associated
- Business Model/insurance (startup issues)
- Mentoring/internships/next generation –
- Land use tax breaks to land owner who don't really utilize/optimize farmland use. How to incentivize?(Land access)
- Promoting grazing over hay
- Capital
- Educate VDACS re: mobile, clarify the process.