



Southern Tier West Salamanca, NY

A thorough feasibility study indicated that new meat processing facilities were not warranted, but in the process developed many new ideas to remove barriers for local meat producers.

AMS GRANTS AWARDED

Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) 2014, Planning grant for \$24,750

Project types: Enterprise Planning, General Business Planning

HISTORY OF BUSINESS OR PROJECT

In 1969, the county legislatures of Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua Counties of New York adopted a resolution creating Southern Tier West (STW) as a regional planning board. The mission of the Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board is to help coordinate and enhance planning and development activities in the southwest corner of New York to promote social, physical, and economic development in these counties.

This project, initiated by STW, sought to assess the local meat industry, uncover its challenges, and decide whether opening a new red meat processing facility in the southwest region of New York was warranted. STW set out to quantify the following key assumptions: 1) that demand for inspected meat

processing facilities and services exceeded supply; and 2) that customer service, pricing, and value-added processing of those existing facilities were not at the level that farmers desired.

STW contracted with Kitchen Table Consultants, a food business consulting firm, to conduct and write the study. After determining that it would not be feasible to build a new plant, the planning team redirected their efforts to developing a set of recommendations to address some of the regional meat supply chain challenges.

WHY THEY CHOSE TO APPLY FOR AN AMS GRANT/WHAT AN AMS GRANT MEANT FOR THEIR BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION?

STW indicated that while their agency would have conducted some sort of assessment, the study would not have been as robust without the AMS grant funds. The funds allowed STW to hire an expert consulting firm that went far beyond the agency's internal data collection capacity by compiling and analyzing secondary data and collecting primary data through on-site interviews with processors. A less detailed study would have resulted in bias towards the meat

producers' needs without understanding the context of the processors' capacity and challenges. The AMS grant also freed up STW staff resources to do other food system development work, such as explore regional food hub concepts.

KEY IMPACTS OF THE GRANT, SHORT-TERM AND LONGER-TERM

Most of STW and their local Cornell Cooperative Extension programming is on the farmer/rancher side. The work of Kitchen Table Consultants really opened up relationships with meat processors, distributors, and others in the regional meat supply chain. They visited them in person and built relationships and trust.

"The turn that the entire project took, away from building a new meat processing facility, was a big "aha" for us. Finding out that there was not a need for a new facility and that existing plants had excess capacity at certain times of the year really challenged our original assumptions."

— Project Director Kimberly Mendola

The final report suggested a couple of approaches towards addressing gaps in the regional meat supply chain: (1) creating a variety of tools and projects to improve upon the state of meat processing in the region, including programs to bring the local meat processors together for roundtable discussions. Additional programming could include education modules to unify farmers' needs with what the processors can deliver; and (2) raising capital to assist local processors through a voluntary program designed to ensure their capacity, whether that be via equipment upgrades, succession planning, butchery training programs, or business analysis (Vermont did something similar to this from 2011-2017 with their Farm to Plate Meat Processing Task Force, which was also supported with AMS funding).

Overall, communication between farmers and processors improved over the course of this project and participants also gained a better grasp of who was out there and what services they provide which opened up new possibilities. Although there are still some farmers who would like to see a new plant, most of the participants understand that a new facility just does not make economic sense.

WHERE THEY WOULD LIKE TO GO NEXT

Kimberly LaMendola the former Project Director, suggested a few ideas on what to do next including, working more closely with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) agent Matt LeRoux on his project to educate consumers on the affordability/accessibility of buying meat in bulk and building a website called MeatSuite which connects farmers with consumers. She also likes LeRoux's creative solutions for those that don't have freezer space, such as the Meat Locker project that CCE piloted in a couple other communities.

Although the project developed some solid ideas based on quality research, the resources are not available to continue advancing any of those ideas. STW is now focusing their resources on developing a regional food hub. They are also networking producers and processors via a regional agriculture industry summit, planned for spring 2020, that will feature a specialty focus on the regional meat supply chain. Additionally, with the recently enhanced New York State Farm-to-School funding streams, several school districts are now connected with local meat producers as sources for part of their need for ground beef and pre-made beef patties.

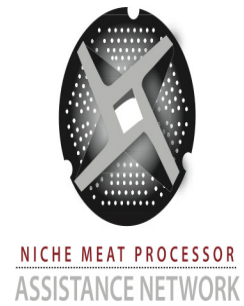
REFERENCES/LINKS

<http://www.kitchentableconsultants.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/meatprocessingstudy.pdf>

<https://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/network/meat-processing>

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This case study was created in fulfillment of a cooperative research agreement between the Marketing Services Division of the Agricultural Marketing Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA AMS) and Oregon State University's Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network (NMPAN).

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