

2023



**Niche Meat
Processor
Assistance
Network**

Annual Report

Prepared By :

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May 1, 2023

Dear Funder,



It has been some time since our organization, the Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network (NMPAN) has sent out an annual report. Actually it's been four years; 2019 was our most recent, to be exact. Everything changed in 2020 and we have been running to keep up with the workload ever since. We finally are able to take a breath, look up, and witness all the changes that have happened both in the niche meat industry and to our tiny but mighty organization. We want to share some of them with you here.

Before we begin describing our changes, impacts, accolades, and other developments at NMPAN, we wanted to first thank you for standing by our side. For our small organization to have stable long-term funding has meant so much to us. Thankfully, we now are writing and winning sizable federal funding awards for our work, but the private foundations, businesses, and donors are the heart of our funding sources. You care about the work we do and make it a priority in your budgets so we'd like to thank you again for keeping us in mind when you make your grants, donations, and sponsorship awards.

NMPAN is considered a project of the Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems within the College of Agriculture at Oregon State University. We are not our own non-profit, we are not a trade association, nor do we get regular annual funding for our work from our sponsoring institution. We have to raise 100% of our funding each year. It is a daunting task, but we value the relationship we have with OSU and our access to additional researchers, graphic designers, videographers, business managers, extension specialists, and others within the university umbrella that amplify our efforts.

Throughout the following pages, you'll see our annual report, with data from last year's membership survey. There are many exciting developments happening and opportunities galore, along with big growing challenges, too. As we continue to learn from each other, the scope of our work grows and we become more capable of taking these challenges head-on while capturing more opportunities to better support our community

NMPAN staff and our advisory board are enthusiastic about what we have achieved in the last 14 years, our new funding opportunities and prospects for growth. We thank you for being along with us over the years and look forward to a future of collaboration.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rebecca Thistlethwaite".

Rebecca Thistlethwaite, Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Zarling".

David Zarling, Program Manager

Our Scope

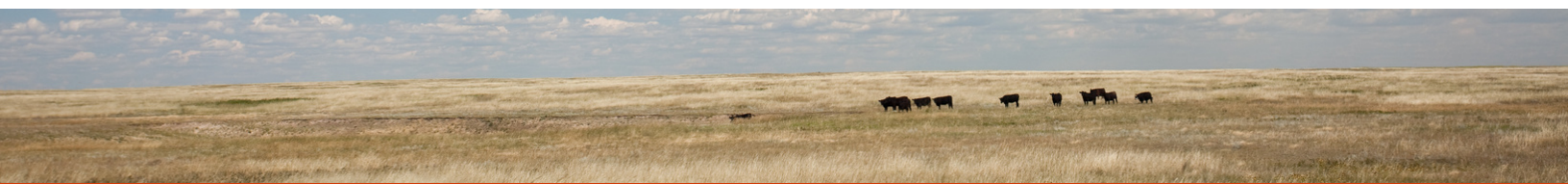
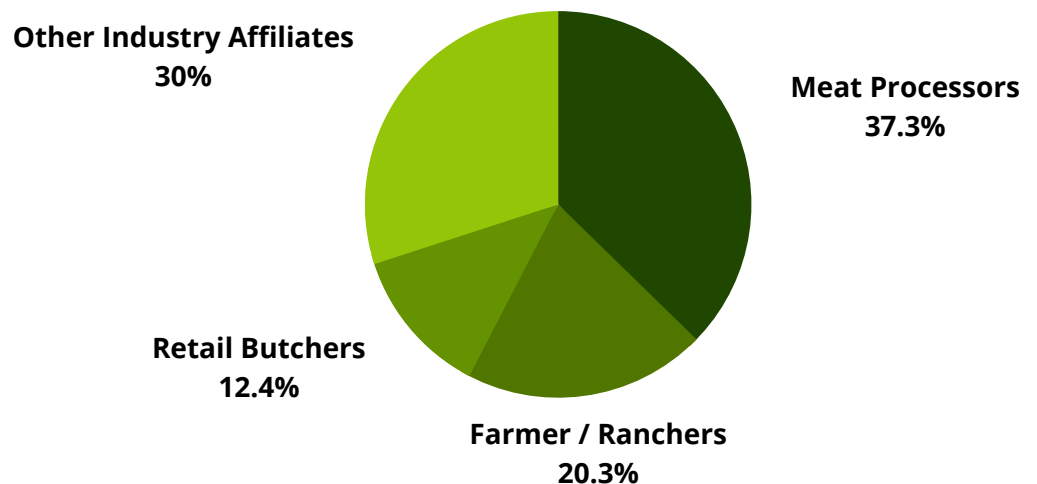
NMPAN, an Extension community of practice housed at Oregon State University, is the leading authority on the business of small-scale meat processing. We are focused on developing, supporting, and growing niche meat supply chains.

Who is NMPAN?

Our Primary Audience are small-scale meat processing plants (USDA inspected and custom exempt) with approximately 50 employees or less.

Our Secondary Audiences include:

- livestock producers and meat sellers: we support the people demanding processing services so processing plants can stay busy and profitable.
- those looking to get into meat processing
- those that serve, support and work within niche meat supply chains: non-profits, universities, Extension, NGOs, trade organizations and others.



Our Vision

We believe, and are committed to proving, that a stable base of profitable and nimble small and mid-sized meat processors are essential to bringing sustainably- and humanely-raised meat and poultry to local and regional markets. Our theory of change is that connecting meat processors to each other and to supply-chain actors creates opportunities for peer-exchange, problem-solving, better understanding of different challenges and needs of the sustainable meat value chain.



Our Mission

1

To help small meat processors thrive by growing our shared wealth of information and innovation.

2

To offer tools and technical assistance for small processors and the farmers, marketers, and meat buyers who depend on them.

3

Incorporation of the whole array of interests involved in the supply chain model to support the long-term viability of the niche meat sector.

Our Team

NMPAN currently has two full-time employees- Rebecca Thistlethwaite as Director and David Zarling as Program Manager. Rebecca has been with the organization for seven years and David a little over one year. NMPAN is working with the OSU Human Resources Department to advertise and hire a new half-time program manager and half-time grants manager position by the end of 2023.

In addition to staff, NMPAN has a team of 10 expert consultants that offer technical assistance to start-up and existing meat processors through our weekly Office Hours program.



Rebecca Thistlethwaite
Program Director



David Zarling
Program Manager



TBA
0.5 FTE
Program Manager



TBA
0.5 FTE
Grants Manager

Key Activities:



Current Grants:



- **Peer Learning:** with a Google Group listserv and the Small Meat Processor Support Facebook group. We have over 5,000 members in the two different formats sharing and learning from one another.
 - **Webinars & Videos:** we have delivered over 100 webinars in the last 14 years, and our YouTube channel has 63 videos and nearly 2,000 subscribers.
 - **Short Courses:** the Western Meat School, which won the Western Extension Risk Management Education Center’s Outstanding Project award in 2023, and the Meat Processor Academy online short courses.
 - **Website:** with around 15,000 page views monthly
 - **Newsletter:** with nearly 3,500 subscribers now
 - **Office Hours:** we have delivered over 300 hours of one-on-one phone calls since this program began in 2021
 - **Case Studies & Research**
 - **Policy Education & Engagement**
 - **Workforce Development Program:** this is a newly developing program that is starting with an industry needs assessment in 2023 in order to develop high-quality training and education programs for the Pacific Northwest region
 - **Consulting & Advising**
-
- **USDA Agricultural Marketing Service:** Local Foods Promotion Program “Meat of the Middle” grant 2021-2024
 - **USDA Agricultural Marketing Service:** Meat and Poultry Processing Technical Assistance Cooperative Agreement 2022-2024
 - **USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture:** Workforce Development Grant 2023-2026
 - **Western Extension Risk Management Education Center:** Meat & Poultry Processing Grant 2023-2025
 - **Private Foundations:** San Benito Foundation/Globetrotter Foundation, TomKat Ranch Educational Foundation, Clementine Fund, and Sandy River Charitable Foundation
 - **Subawards & Contracts:** Iowa State University

The Data Tells the Story - Our Annual Evaluation

NMPAN is composed of meat processors, butchers, farmers, ranchers, consultants, academia, government officials, and many other stakeholders up and down the supply chain. Every year we survey our over 1,500 members about who they are, what they like about NMPAN, and what they want to learn more about. Membership is always free and voluntary.

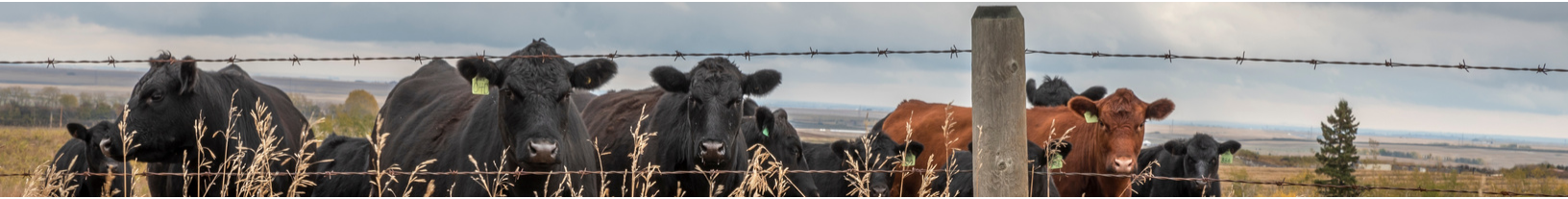
According to our annual survey, the top 3 resources that NMPAN offers our members include:

1. Learning from others on the NMPAN listserv or Facebook page (peer-to-peer learning)
2. Used information from the NMPAN website
3. Learning from the NMPAN newsletter

The top 3 benefits of being a part of our network include:

- 1. Increased their openness to learning and hearing from others in this industry (peer-to-peer learning)**
- 2. Increased their awareness about regulatory compliance and where to find answers (regulatory understanding)**
- 3. Increased their knowledge about good business practices (business know-how)**



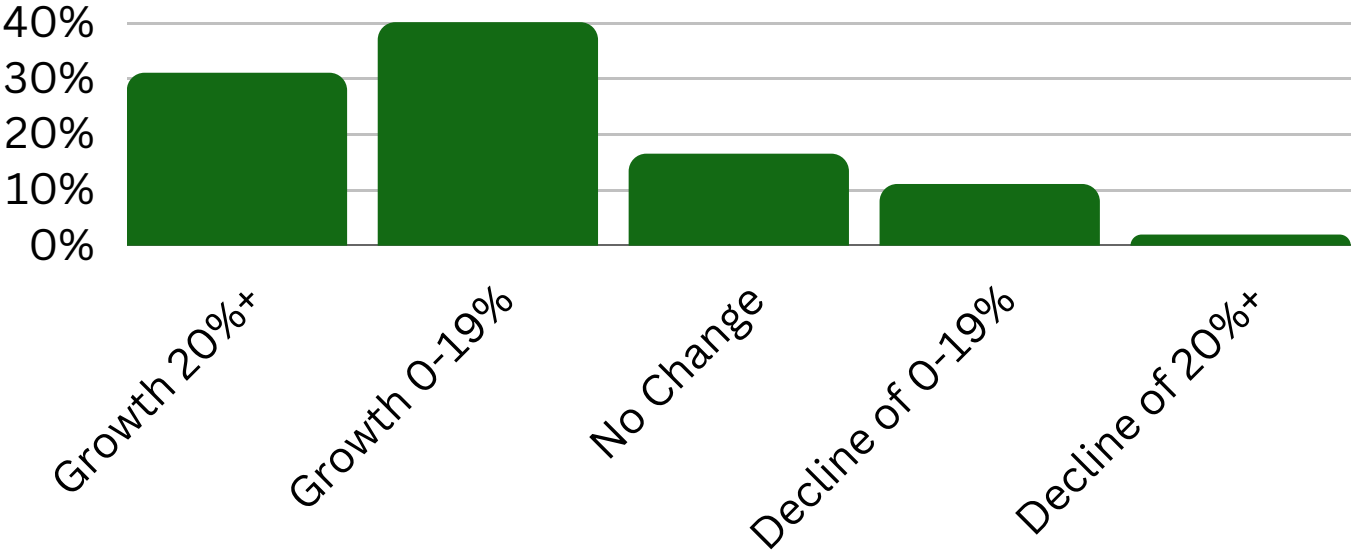


When asked what other topics they wanted to learn more about, these were the top 10 most requested topical areas, with the addition of some ties. NMPAN will be updating existing content on these topics as well as developing new content or adding resources that other trusted experts have developed.

Top 10 Most Requested Topics by NMPAN Constituents	
General Topic Category	Count
Technical skills (slaughter, fabrication, packing, further processing procedures)	10
Financial management and business planning	9
Marketing and branding	7
Food safety training	6
Wastewater/Solid waste management	5
Facility design	4
USDA inspection 101	4
Access to grants/Raising capital/Financing	4
Cost of production/Pricing	4
Humane handling and slaughter	4
Innovations in value-added processing	4
On-farm slaughter / Custom exemption	4
Key performance indicators/ Metrics/ Benchmarking	4

Our annual survey then asked some questions specifically of the meat industry business owners in the network. We wanted to know how their businesses were doing, what remaining challenges existed coming out of the global pandemic, and a bit more about their size, inspection status, and location.

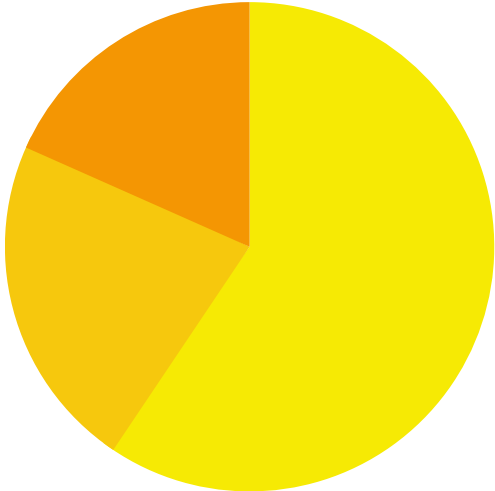
In the past year, has your business experienced any revenue growth, retraction, or holding steady financially?



What are you top 3 post-pandemic challenges as an organization?

Busier than ever, can't keep up with demand
18.4%

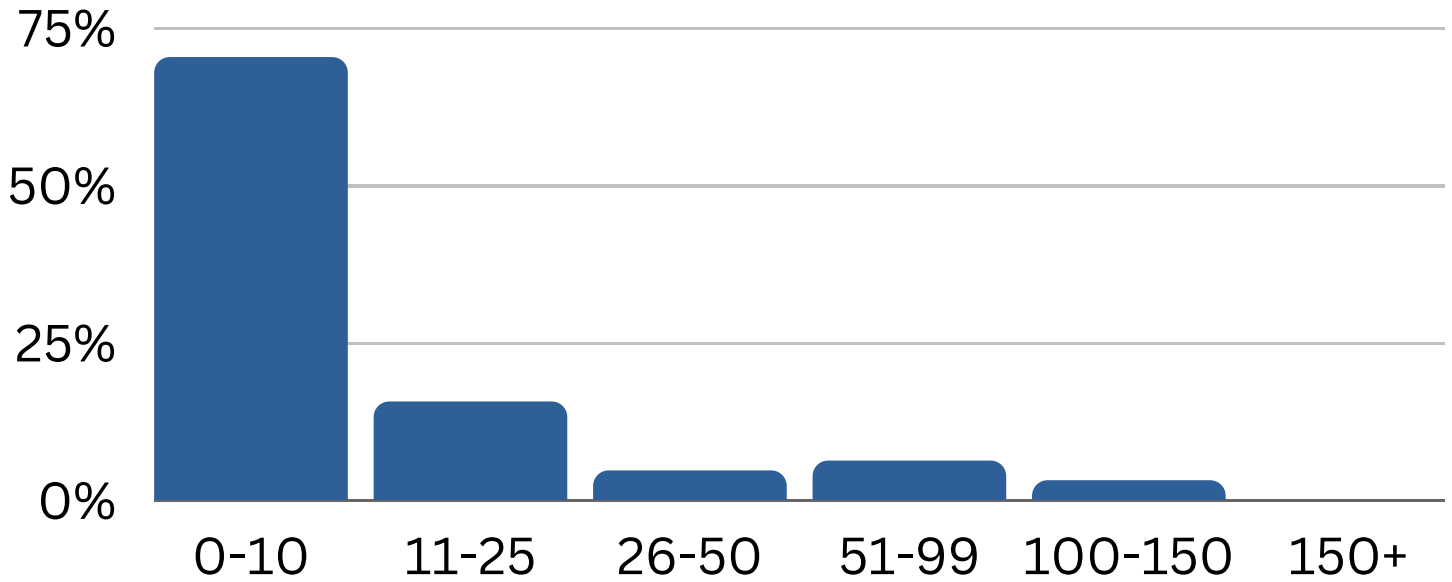
Constrained labor, fewer employees, sick employees
22.2%



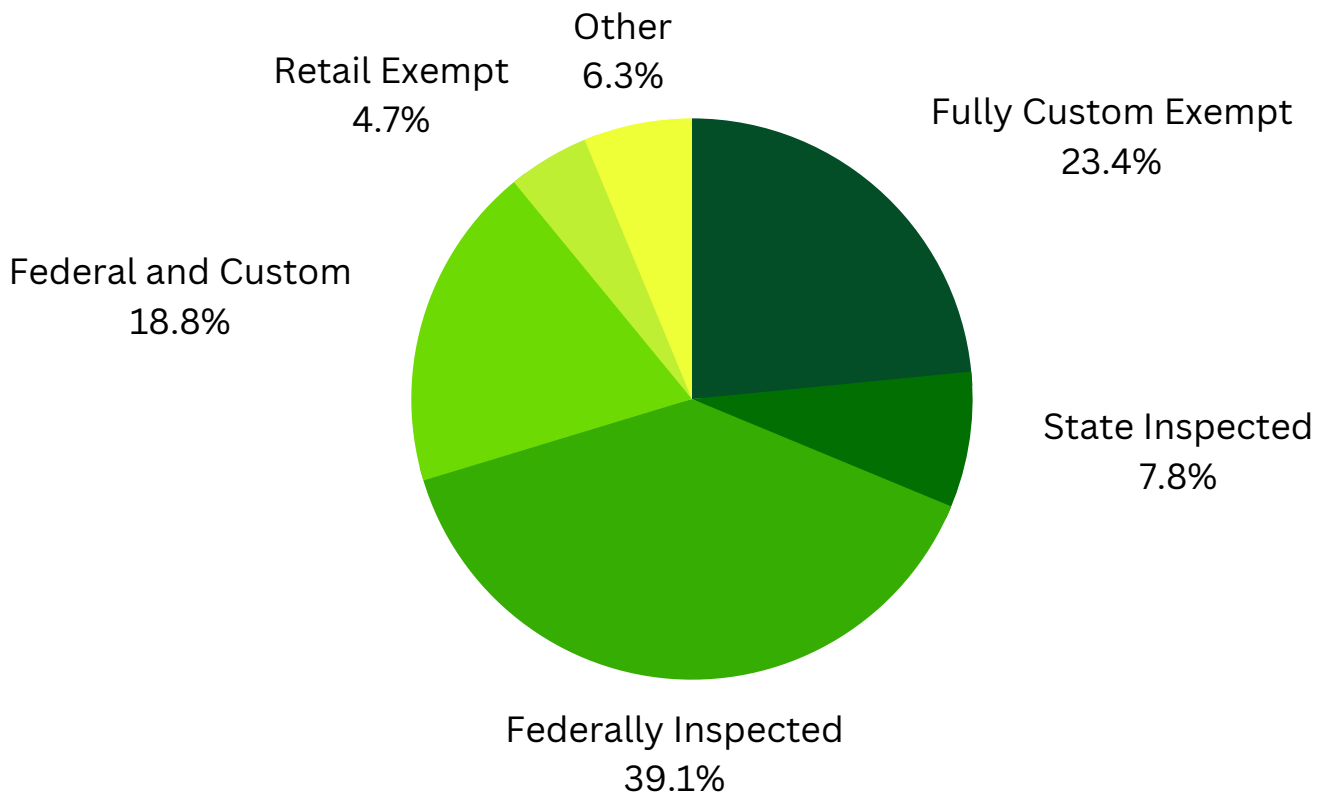
Cost of business going up
59.4%

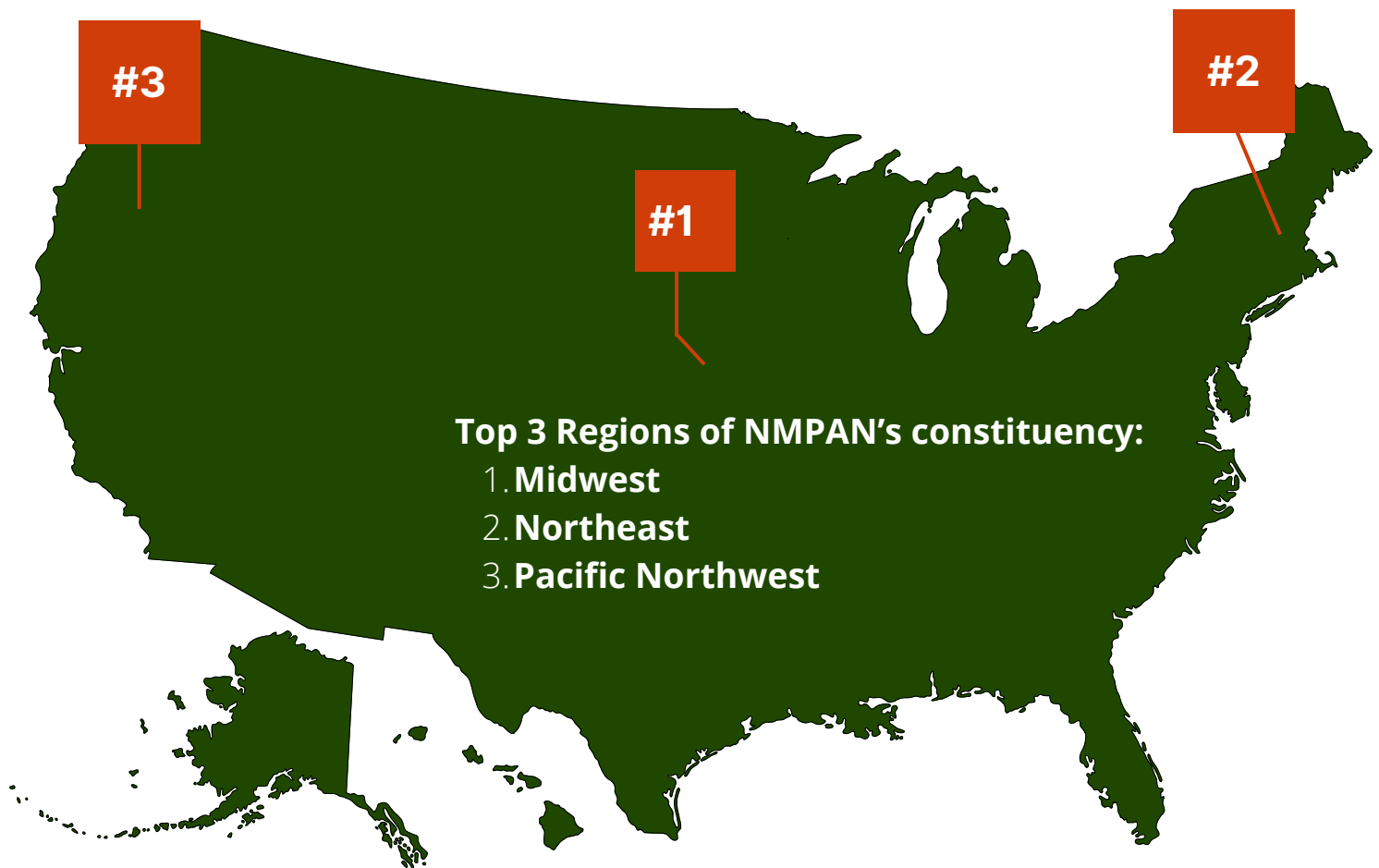
Survey Questions continued:

How many full time employees does your operation have?



Under what type of inspection do you process?





According to this survey, the typical NMPAN network member is an inspected facility (either state or federal) that has fewer than 25 employees and is located in the Midwest. Plants are mostly seeing growth in revenues, but their costs are also going up and they struggle to keep up with mounting demand. However, we serve diverse plants across the country and even beyond, answering questions from processors in Canada, Mexico, Australia, and other countries.

The main constituency of NMPAN are the small and very small meat processors who provide custom processing services for farmers and ranchers in their regions. Many of them are growing and bursting at the seams, while others are holding steady and maintaining a consistent operation. NMPAN seeks to help both the start-ups and the existing operations with resources to help them create and grow economically thriving businesses, pay and treat their employees like a winning team, harvest animals humanely, comply with and exceed local and federal regulations, and produce high-quality, wholesome, and safe meat products for consumers.

Future Developments?

In 2023 NMPAN launched a small, intensive peer learning experience called the Meat Processor Academy Mastermind group; This program consists of 18 very small to small meat processors in a cohort-style learning format. We will be launching a similar Mastermind for meat producers in 2024. If this intensive program works well and helps move the needle for these processors and producers, we may continue the program every other year.

With the award of the NIFA workforce development grant in 2023, NMPAN will be working on a PNW regional level trying to understand the meat industry workforce needs and collaborating with community colleges and the Northwest Meat Processors Association to develop training and apprenticeship programs that best meet the needs of the industry and its workforce. We hope that what we learn from this process can be shared with the rest of the country to inform the development of similar programs.

In 2023 and 2024, NMPAN plans to dramatically improve the layout and flow of our website in order to improve the user experience. We will update much of the content and archive older content, improving the accessibility of the available information. This is critical to not only serve our members but also to remain the one-stop-shop for niche meat processing that we endeavor to be. We will also be translating even more of our resources into Spanish to serve that growing audience of producers and processors.

Also new is our involvement in the newly created **Northwest and Rocky Mountain Regional Food Business Center**, which should launch in July 2023 with USDA funding of \$30 million dollars.

NMPAN will co-lead the meat theme team, along with Montana State University, in order to address the needs of the niche meat sector in the six states that comprise the Center (Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado).

Working with institutions and organizations in each of those six states will help us deepen our stakeholder engagement and get resources deployed on a ground level in those communities to strengthen local supply chains for animal proteins.



We Hope You'll Continue Working With Us.



Email Address

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Website

www.nichemeatprocessing.org



To Donate, follow this link,
type in Center for Small Farms
Fund with NMPAN in the
comment line

<https://give.fororegonstate.org/PL1Uv3Fkug>

NMPAN staff and our advisory board are enthusiastic about what we have achieved in the last 14 years, our new funding opportunities and prospects for growth.

We thank you for being along with us over the years and look forward to a future of collaboration.

