

Needs assessment for small-scale livestock harvesting and processing facilities in Northern California

Many livestock producers in Northern California are increasingly exploring niche markets for their meat products. A small-scale USDA- and State-inspected meat harvesting and processing facility would facilitate entry into these new markets for many producers. To identify the scale and seasonal requirements producers have for such a facility, researchers surveyed 497 livestock producers. The survey asked producers to rank their current satisfaction with existing processing facilities, their interest in using a small-scale processing facility, their total and seasonal needs related to meat processing, and the distance they are willing to travel to use a specialized meat processing plant.

Key Findings:

- 56% of respondents who indicated interest in using a small-scale processing facility identified access to slaughter and processing services as the largest barrier to entry into alternative niche markets.
- Livestock producers are generally satisfied with the quality of the work performed by the existing processing facilities, but the production capacity of the facilities is still not adequate to meet current producers' demand. 72% of respondents indicated that the current facilities are not meeting their current demand.
- Distance to livestock processing facilities was ranked as very important to most producers. Almost 90% of respondents are willing to travel up to 60 minutes to reach a facility, but only 55% are willing to travel up to 90 minutes.
- Producers identified their local and adjacent counties as their primary preference for a final market, followed by the Bay Area and the Sacramento region.



The study concludes that the proportion of producers willing to experiment with new markets through slow conversion of a portion of their business to niche production may increase if options to alternative meat processing services become more readily available.

Next Steps:

- John Harper, Livestock Advisor for Mendocino County, and Shermain Hardesty, Director of the Small Farms Program, received funding to complete a feasibility study for an approximately 20,000 head/year processing facility in the North Bay region. This study will further work to identify the most appropriate location for such a resource.

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Citation:

Doran, Morgan, Temra Costa, John Harper, Theresa Becchetti, Stephanie Larson, Shermain Hardesty, and Roger Ingram. 2007. *Need assessment for small-scale livestock harvesting and processing facilities in Northern California*. Fairfield, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.

