

LA PLATA COUNTY

FOOD PLAN

MEAT PROCESSING

Animal welfare is a significant focus within the U.S. slaughter industry, emphasizing humane treatment throughout the livestock supply chain. Federal regulations mandate the ethical transport, handling, and slaughter of cattle to ensure their well-being. This complex process underscores the need for continued improvements in transport conditions, facility design, and handling practices to promote ethical standards and meet consumer expectations for humane treatment. Meat processing needs have increased over the last decade and have included innovative practices to increase options for slaughter and processing. Options include on-farm slaughtering, mobile processing units (MPUs) and state and federal inspected facilities.



BENEFITS

- Enhance production and processing efficiency
- Support a sharing economy
- Allow for farmers to diversify operations
- Reduce food miles for product, cutting environmental impact as well as heightening quality
- Support direct-to-consumer sales and local markets
- Promote innovation in systems and equipment design
- Create jobs and stimulate economic activity,
- Provide essential services for farmers and communities
- Minimize animal stress and suffering during processing

CHALLENGES

- Requiring pivots due to changing regulations
- Increasing operational costs
- Increasing challenge in recruitment and retaining skilled workers
- Maintaining facility infrastructure and equipment
- Managing waste, emissions, and water usage
- Changing consumer preferences and supply chain disruptions
- Increasing gap in knowledge on feasibility for new businesses
- Lacking awareness on procedures and protocols

Research conducted in New England revealed that one of the major barriers to expanding regional animal processing capacity is the lack of skilled workers (Lewis & Peters, 2012). Workforce education and training challenges are widespread, impacting the ability to maintain operations. Initiatives to tackle these challenges include creating meat processing programs at local education institutions and offering short course and certifications through organizations like the USDA and other local agencies.

Cultural practices and trends heavily influence food demands. Slaughter and meat processing facilities occupy a crucial role in maintaining public health. To showcase practices, businesses can prioritize transparency and traceability alongside ensuring food quality and safety (Garcia-Diez, et al., 2023). As regional food systems continue to evolve, it is critical to develop meat processing facilities that meet the cultural and social requirements of the communities they serve.

Managing waste effectively is a significant challenge and is crucial for achieving environmental sustainability. Improper disposal methods can lead to pollution and health risks. Researchers are exploring alternative uses for animal byproducts, including generating renewable energy, composting, and chemical processing.

Within focus groups, it was named how far some farmers need to travel to meat processing facilities. An opportunity could

be developing an MPU, which would minimize the distance necessary for farmers to travel to process their livestock, reducing carbon emissions and heightening the quality of their product through increased animal welfare.

Slaughter facilities differ significantly from processors in the services they provide and require meticulous planning to ensure both efficiency and food safety (Thiboumery, 2009). The type of processing performed at a facility greatly influences its design, equipment, and regulatory requirements. Expanding regional meat processing capacity demands investment, as many facility owners have reported that inadequate infrastructure limits their ability to operate at full potential in their regions.

Local, state, and federal regulations require that retail meat products be processed in inspected facilities. Regular meat inspections play a vital role in safeguarding public health by monitoring for animal diseases. However, custom plants, which process meat sole for personal use, are exempt from federal inspection requirements but must comply with state and local laws (USDA FSIS, 2018).

In 2021, meat and poultry processing plants employed nearly one-third of the workforce in this sector. Regional slaughter and processing facilities can bolster local economies by shortening supply chains. However, these facilities often face challenges, such as operating below capacity due to seasonal fluctuations and shortages of skilled labor (Lewis & Peters, 2012).



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

This institution is an equal opportunity provider. For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to www.extension.iastate.edu/legal.

VEA ESTE PÓSTER
EN ESPAÑOL

bit.ly/LPCespañol

