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Direct Marketing Beef, Pork, or Lamb: Is This an Opportunity for You?

Direct marketing of livestock products is a venture that can provide additional income if you do it right. While considering this new marketing plan, there are four key steps needed for you to market your animals directly to consumers: identify your market, find a processor, brush up on your selling skills, and correctly communicate what you have to offer.

1. Identify your market

Who are the people most likely to buy your product and how will you reach them? Do you have access to sell at the local farmers' market to sell some retail cuts? Maybe you have enough interested coworkers and neighbors to sell a few animals as halves and quarters?

Familiarize yourself with local, state, and federal laws pertaining to selling product directly to consumers. These laws will affect how you package, label, and sell your product. This is described a bit more in #2 below. You will likely need an approved label. A template can be found on Clemson Livestock and Poultry Health website: <https://www.clemson.edu/public/lph/scmpid/package-labeling.html>

Each market opportunity has its advantages and disadvantages. Try to estimate how much product you can reasonably sell at each market before you start processing and packaging your product(s). If you choose to sell packaged meat, realize you will need to have adequate cold storage to maintain inventory. Also, be aware that some cuts will sell better than others. This can lead to an abundance of certain packages. Ideally, have a few orders to fill before you move to the next step.

2. Find a meat processor

If you want to sell your product across state lines or through wholesale channels to restaurants, you will need to find a federally inspected processor. If you want to sell freezer products to neighbors and friends, the state inspected options are usually adequate.

Several meat processors are located around South Carolina: some are under federal inspection and some are under state inspection. The Clemson University Livestock and Poultry Health website can help you find state inspected processors <https://www.clemson.edu/public/lph/scmpid/establishments.html>. If you wish to find a federally inspected processor, try the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service directory at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/mpi-directory>.

Processors in this state have a wide range of services and capabilities they offer. Communicate with your processor about what, if any, further processing options (i.e., smoked product, custom sausages, cured products, etc.) as well as how you would like your product packaged (butcher paper vs. vacuum

packaging.) Depending on what species of animal you are processing be sure to communicate expectations (aging times for beef, for example). Also, ask if the processor can help with labeling your meat products, as some perform this service.

Note: once you find a processor you want to use, call them and reserve a time for your animals. Some processors have a long waiting list, especially if you only want a few animals processed.

3. Brush up on your selling skills

Have a plan for advertising: how are you going to get the word out that you have to sell? Does your farm have a social media account, a webpage, and a phone number to call for orders?

Differentiate yourself: you may not be able to compete on price with the grocery meat counter. Find those items that appeal to your market and fit your way of farming: are there unique genetics of your animals? Does your farm have a long, storied history? Find a way to explain to your customers why your product is a better than what can be found at the grocery meat counter. Common examples are grass fed, natural, organic, locally grown, and SC Certified grown. Understand what is involved with each marketing opportunity.

Look professional: If you plan on offering individual meat cuts, explore a professional farm label and logo. You may also elect to have brochures, business cards, vinyl signs on your vehicles, and banners to hang from your tent at the farmers' market. The goal of selling yourself and your operation should be to gain long term customer loyalty and further stand out in the crowd.

Learn from your customers: package size, cut preferences, and packaging material are often tailored to specific customer needs.

4. Correctly (and concisely) communicate what you have to offer

Most consumers are not well versed on how to buy meat outside of a grocery store. You may need to educate them on how the product was raised, processed, packaged, and priced. Also, make sure your customers understand time limitations due to availability of finished animals and/or the processor's workload. This may differ drastically when selling halves and quarters versus retail cuts.

When marketing as a whole, half, or quarter animal, it is important to communicate the expected yield amount to the customer. At a minimum, does the customer have adequate storage? Also, help the customer understand some key points about the animal they are buying:

- Live weight: what the animal weighed before being sent to processor
- Dressed or carcass weight: after slaughter and before cutting
- Packaged weight: pounds of packaged meat (including bone-in cuts) after cutting
- Boneless meat: how much boneless meat, should this be requested

Typical processing losses and what to expect in terms of pounds of meat per animal*

Animal	Live wt.	Dressing %	Carcass wt.	Cutting %	Pkg Meat	Boning %	Boneless
Beef	1312	62%	813	68%	553	85%	470
Pork	245	72%	176	80%	141	85%	120
Lamb	127	52%	66	75%	50		

*Depending on preference for bone in cuts versus boneless, organ meats, the amount of ground meat and fat one chooses, yields per animal can vary.

Most processors will cut the carcass into retail meat cuts according to what the customer wants. Familiarize yourself with the various cuts of as pertaining to beef, lamb and/or pork. This will help you in selling your customer the cuts they will eat and enjoy the most. Recently, Clemson partnered with Range Meat Academy to update beef, pork, and lamb cut sheets. These cut sheets will soon be available on the Clemson Agribusiness Team and the Clemson Livestock and Forage Team websites.

Does this still sound appealing?

Direct marketing farm products takes patience and persistence. Those that have been successful building a brand have usually spent years doing so. If you are in this for the long haul and enjoy selling your farm's product, then this may be the opportunity you are looking for.

Contact us with questions

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