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Summary:

- Dairy inspectors in Minnesota work with both large and small facilities and are guided by many statutes, ordinances, and rules in this work.
- New businesses often have a good experience when they come into the regulatory process when they know exactly what they want to do so inspectors have something around which to offer guidance. Inspectors are not allowed to give background information and pointers on the “how-tos” of dairy farming and processing but instead direct businesses to other resources, such as the University of Minnesota. Dairy inspectors can give recommendations to dairy producers and dairy processors. Dairy inspectors will often give producers and processors additional contacts to assist with obtaining guidance in a particular area.
- Three characteristics of entrepreneurs who successfully navigate the dairy inspection process include 1) Well prepared, 2) Open to understanding regulations, and 3) Willing to follow regulations. A willingness to learn is essential.
- A growing number of dairy producers and dairy processors, large inspection territories, and ongoing inspector training requirements are just a few factors that are challenging for dairy inspectors to balance.

Day-To-Day Job Experiences

As a dairy inspector for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), Lisa Ramacher spends four to five days a week in the field inspecting dairy farms and dairy processing plants. This includes both on-farm processing facilities - which have been growing to fill the demand for locally produced food - and also large dairy manufacturers. Additionally, Ramacher licenses milk haulers, tests pasteurizers, types up inspection reports, samples products to test for food safety requirements, and attends trainings to keep her certifications up-to-date (such as Food Safety Modernization Act trainings).

The main statutes that affect Ramacher's daily responsibilities include:

- Pasteurized Milk Ordinance - pertaining to Grade A Milk
- Code of Federal Regulations 7 (CFR) 58 - regulations around processing plants
- Minnesota Statute 32 - rules for dairy within MN
- 21 CFR 120 - Hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP plans)
- 21 CFR part 110 - good manufacturing practices (GMPs) for any food plant (including dairy)
- 21 CFR 131 - defines all dairy products
- FSMA - includes recommendations on food safety preventive controls.
- USDA-Milk for Manufacturing Purposes and its' Production and Processing

Interactions with Establishments & Small Business Owners

One of Ramacher's most rewarding experiences involved working with one of the first on-farm processing plants in Minnesota. The owners had a strong background in food safety. For example, the chief cheesemaker had taken university coursework on food safety and because of this she already understood the importance of sanitation for quality food products from the start of the cheesemaking venture. What made it a successful inspector-business-owner partnership was that the owners were willing to do whatever was needed to make their product work and be safe for consumption. Additionally, they had high quality standards for their own business, including humane treatment of their animals, high-quality cheese, and excellent sanitation practices. "It was fun because they were willing to work *with* you," Ramacher noted.

Factors That Make the Inspection Process Easier/Harder

According to Ramacher, it is very beneficial for new businesses to come into the regulatory process knowing exactly what they want to do. It is difficult for her as an inspector to offer guidance when the business owners do not know what kind of product they are going to create or who their market will be. Ramacher provides entrepreneurs guidance as it pertains to the statutes and laws, but as an inspector, she is not allowed to give background information and pointers on the "how-tos" of dairy farming and processing. However, she does direct business owners to the University of Minnesota's Pilot Processing Plant to gain more information. (Other resources too.)

Three main traits that Ramacher sees in dairy entrepreneurs who are successful in the regulatory system include:

- 1) Well prepared: they've taken classes and trainings; they have a clear picture of their business plan, and they have a long term plan (5+ years) for their business
- 2) Open to understanding regulations: they want to know and understand the rules in order to have a successful business.
- 3) Willing to follow regulations: they understand the need for food safety to keep consumers healthy.

The MDA's dairy inspection unit has been expanding to keep up with the growing number of start-up businesses. This expansion benefits Ramacher because it gives her more experience to draw from as she's now involved with more innovative, new food businesses; as time goes on, she learns how to better help and guide these business owners. However, as time is more stretched; there is more time pressure with the added number of businesses to inspect, which takes time away from completing other tasks.

Ramacher covers about five counties and only has to drive for day trips, not overnight trips, like a few of her other colleagues. This can be challenging when she needs to make it from one end of her territory to the other for an urgent issue. Beyond these daily inspection duties, Ramacher

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participates in continued education trainings to keep her certifications up to date. It's a time commitment that is necessary but often takes time away from working in the field, so managing all of these factors is a balancing act.

Tools/Resources Provided to Small Business Owners

One of the main resources Ramacher advises small business owners to use is the MDA on-farm processing guide, titled, "Starting a Small Dairy Processing Plant - The Basics." This advises small business owners on who to talk to, what the various licensing requirements are, what statutes and laws to follow, and considerations they will need to make around their physical structures and facilities. Additionally, Ramacher advises entrepreneurs with incomplete business plans to take the time needed to fill out these plans. Doing more background research is important rather than jumping into processing and sales since dairy is a large capital intensive undertaking with many necessary precautions to keep consumers healthy. In addition, marketing and actually selling your product can be a challenge if you aren't thoughtful in advance about your strategy. When there's an opportunity and interest, Ramacher tries to help business owners connect with other people or entities that can answer questions in these areas of business planning and dairy processing.