



Very Quick Livestock Producers Survey – September, 2014

This survey was conducted from 6 pm, Sept. 10 through 8 am, Sept. 15, 2014. It was a strictly voluntary survey that was sent out via listservs, Facebook, and other email lists. The only identification requested was county of the respondent.

Number of respondents: 70

Number of Minnesota counties represented: 44

Number of respondents using custom-exempt processors: 38

Number of animals marketed per year using custom-exempt processing:	
Animal type	number
Poultry	3,120
Beef	265
Hogs	334
Lamb or goat	415
Other species	65

Number of respondents using Equal-To plants: 25

Number of animals marketed per year using Equal-To inspected processing:	
Animal type	number
Poultry	5,200
Beef	41
Hogs	[error**]

Lamb or goat	78
Other species	0

[** The number of hogs reported on this survey was >15,000. We know this is an error because the total number of head of all livestock (other than poultry) inspected by Minnesota Department of Agriculture inspectors was 15,000 in 2013. It is unclear whether this was due to an accidental insertion of an extra zero, or whether one or more individuals may have reported hogs marketed through a USDA-inspected plant.]

Are your sales or potential sales of meat or poultry limited by difficulties in getting inspected processing?

No limitation -- 13

Limited by distance -- 36

Limited by scheduling -- 26

Limited by other factor -- 13

Estimate of additional animals that respondents would market if not limited by access to processing:	
Animal type	number
Poultry	29,010
Beef	279
Hogs	445
Lamb or goat	665
Other species	225

Counties where respondents said they were "not limited" in sales or potential sales by access to processing:

Chisago

Clay

Douglas

Goodhue

Hubbard

Le Sueur

McLeod (2)

Otter Tail

Rice

Winona

Wright (2)

Counties where respondents said they were limited in sales by distance to processor:

Aitkin (2)
Benton
Big Stone
Blue Earth
Carlton (2)
Chippewa
Cook
Fillmore (2)
Goodhue (3)
Grant (2)
Isanti
Jackson
Kanabec
Koochiching
Le Sueur
Meeker
Morrison
Pine
Pipestone
Polk
Redwood
Rice (2)
St. Louis (3)
Sherburne
Sibley
Swift
Wadena

Descriptions of “Other Limiting Factors” with processing:

- Limited by the scarcity of goat processors.
- We are able to sell all animals off the farm. (goats)
- Finding someone to process goats
- Distance, scheduling, and regulations
- Lack of access/information. The list of USDA/MN Equal To plants is non-existent, or at least I haven't been able to find it yet.
- Inspection costs

- Prefer to butcher lambs/sheep on farm to make sure animals are treated humanely during dispatch however because there is no USDA mobile slaughter unit in the state (like there is in Western Washington State), it makes selling retail cuts off the farm or to any restaurant or grocery store, even in primals, impossible. We are unwilling to sacrifice our animal welfare standards and risk our livestock being treated inhumanely or disrespectfully by butchering at an on-site USDA facility. If we wanted to butcher at a USDA facility it's difficult to find a local USDA facility that is willing to butcher lambs at all or will butcher lambs in their full fleece as we salt, tan, and sell the pelts, even if I am there straight away to retrieve them. Instead, the facilities want the lambs shorn to the skin to prevent the "spread of bacteria", which seems to be nonsense to me. We need to be able to market those pelts in order to cover the cost of hay and other sheep-related farm expenses.
- Access to smaller quantities of good quality newborn holstein calves.
- Ability to find inspected facility within driving distance at all
- The closest 2 USDA plant to me are not acceptable to me or my customers because they do not seem to understand quality control. The best USDA processor closest to me is 1.5 hours away. I have tried poultry as well with the same complaints. [Processor] has consistently torn birds apart. There really needs to be a QUALITY USDA plant for rabbits.
- The nearest facility, which was 75 miles away, stopped doing small batches of chickens. The minimum is now in the 1000's. We now need to travel over 125 miles to the nearest poultry processing facility. Please keep in mind that this involves 2 round trips- one to drop them off and one to pick them up. That is a total of 500 miles of driving.

Comments on How Your Quality of Life is Affected by Access to Processing:

- Right now we just processed under 500 chickens by our own BUT if we needed an inspected processing plant It would affect our time, work and more than anything in higher prices for the consumer. The nearest plant is about two hours away.
- I am farming chickens in the city but don't know what my options are for selling may [be]. I didn't think I had any.
- I direct market grass fed beef. I have 2 FDA inspected small processors within 15 miles of my farm. I know this is the exception, but I'm satisfied with that end of the business
- Currently only raise 5-6 meat goat kids for sale each year sell at central livestock Zumbrota and have 50 ducks and chickens to butcher for our own and relatives, processed at inspected plant.

- I drive about 1 hour to process beef. I raise 2-7 calves per year since 2009. I do it to get fresh, safe, good tasting beef. I sell all but one quarter. It usually pays for my expenses. Not always. I market it as 'natural' beef. I will use medicine if needed. I have used monesin but finish without. I grind on farm. I use as much ear corn as I can but buy rolled corn from the elevator if needed.
- I have to travel about 50 miles for a North Dakota Federal plant. I miss my state = to plant that was 8 miles from my farm and did a much better quality of processing. I find the federal plants are higher volume plants and don't pay attention to detail like the smaller plants do. Our product quality has gone down after our local state = to plant closed and I was forced to go to larger federal inspected plant. We sell certified organic meat products. If our current plant were to discontinue processing certified organic I would need to stop raising livestock because there is not another organic plant within a reasonable distance from our farm.
- I've given up on inspected processing for poultry (400 birds). It did effect my quality of life due to travel to and from the plant - scheduling was also a huge issue. Now we do on-farm processing and it is quite a bit a work itself, detracting for 3 full days each year from our produce production. That give me some time stress, especially with logistics of on-farm pick-up, but this is less stressful and less expensive than going to the plant and back twice.
- We travel 20 minutes (each way) to our pork processor, which is a Minnesota-inspected facility. We travel 1 hour (each way) to our beef processor, which is a USDA-inspected facility. We would have closer Minnesota-inspected options for beef, but we like the processor we use, so are willing to make the drive. Survey does not ask, but we process approx 10-12 head of beef per year. Even though we sell only whole animals, halves and quarters (no retailing cuts of meat) it is extremely unlikely that we would ever consider using a custom exempt facility.
- We have to drive a very long ways to butcher our chickens. This adds to the cost of production both in gas and labor. It also is going to make us invest in more crates, which are expensive, because we have to take as many birds as we can when we go. Our prices are already so high. We're not easy raising them to cover the increased expense this year now that we have to go farther after [Processor] closed. It also affects our scheduling of flocks -- it's harder to justify adding a small flock on at the end of the year to cover anticipated winter sales if needed.
- We currently do not direct market because of the distance to inspected meat processing plants. It is a deal breaker for us.

- I currently travel about 75 miles round trip to take an animal to be processed or pay a fee to have the facility owners come to my home to harvest it - which then leaves me with carcass material to dispose of. I have had several [City] restaurants talk to me about supplying lamb, but I would have to travel to [City] for a USDA processor. With a full-time job outside the farm, this is not possible to do; therefore, I end up taking more of my animals to the [City] auction rather than making more of a profit from selling to a restaurant from the farm.
- **I was not sure what "custom exempt" meant, but said yes assuming it was a processor without USDA approval. If that is not correct, please change my answer to no.
- We need field meat inspectors to be able to view and allow beef animals to be killed in the pasture and then brought to a butcher within 2 hours of kill. This is our preferred method of harvesting our animals since it has zero stress on the animal and allows for smaller or starting farmers to harvest animals with minimal handling facilities. This was how we harvested bison in South Dakota when I worked on a ranch there. SD state meat inspectors would come out to the pasture to inspect animals that were killed in pasture. Its a better way for the animals and farmers, also is cleaner then hauling cattle to butcher.
- For the last several years our local Custom-Except meat processor has said it was his last year and he was retiring. His building and equipment has been listed for sale for the last couple of years. The number of client that has accepts gets fewer and fewer every year. Not knowing if we will have access to a meat processor limits our grass-fed meat production to our personal use and immediate family only. With the next closest meat processor to our location being almost 100 miles away, we remain limited because of our meat processing options. It makes it almost impossible to market large volume in state and even more difficult for out of state. 2 hours one way with animals is way too far.
- no close access to poultry processing limits our productions to our own family even though we would have a market for these birds if processing was available.
- It currently is not profitable for me to drive to a processing plant to be able to sell my meat any way except as a live animal. I could achieve better profit if I could package and sell portions of a cow or lamb rather than a whole animal.
- I drive 45 miles to find a usda cert poultry processor I sell direct to families and coops so I need the usda . What really bugs me is I pay extra for a guy or gal to sit on a chair. The butchering is exactly the same. Just to have the usda stamp I feel it is an unnecessary burden to have the stamp when we have state inspected processors. I would never use a bad processor - it results in meats I cannot sell. I am very picky about this. Make it equal

and fair for everyone and just have state inspections for both retail and direct to consumers

- I had been traveling to [City], MN 120 miles one way, for goat processing. Now that they have closed I cannot find a processor at a reasonable distance to allow me to grow my goat herd. My farm was Animal Welfare Approved for goats and there is a market for goat meat in [City], however without a processor, I am unable to raise goats for meat.
- The nearest "equal to" processor to me is 76 miles away. If there were a processor closer to me, I could raise my birds in smaller batches that are processed more frequently throughout the summer. This would make my daily chores easier and spread my feed costs out over a longer period of time. Raising multiple smaller batches of birds would be beneficial to them as well, by giving them more space in the shelters I use.
- Travel to processing plants is a fairly large time drain for me -- time that I could certainly use at home to build fences, take care of necessary paperwork, or just spend time with my family. I travel 110 miles one-way for beef and pork Equal-To processing. I travel 72 miles one-way for chicken processing. This takes a lot of time -- the shortest possible trip for poultry is about 3.5 hours, and the shortest possible trip for beef or pork is about 4.5 hours, counting time to unload animals or to load meat. Each trip has to be made twice: once to deliver animals and once to pick up the meat. I've built a decent farm business out of selling meats and poultry locally in northern Minnesota, but having closer Equal-To processing plants would be a blessing.
- Too far and costly given distance and size of their operation. We travel 180 miles round trip per processing batch twice. One to drop, once to pick up. Total of 360 miles per batch.
- We are unable to sell cuts and smaller quantities of meat to customers due to restrictions on processing and the custom exempt laws. We believe Minnesotans are smart enough to be able to meet a farmer and processor and make their own food safety decisions. We believe larger volume facilities create more opportunities for food borne pathogens and that small local farms and processing is a safer option, even if there is significantly less regulation.
- In order to meet the expectations of my customers, the animals I raise for them need to be raised, handled, and processed in an ethical way, focused on their welfare. Scheduling issues and delays at the processor often result in animals needing to be held in pens, stressful and not an option for my business model. I have two processors within 20 miles, but the issue for me is scheduling.

- There is a small processor in our nearby town but since it not a usda inspected facility it limits the ways we can sell the meat. Needing to pre-sell live animals vs. Being able to sell that meat at a farmers market etc. I love supporting our local small town processor and feel strongly about supporting local small businesses such as his but at the same time it would give us greater opportunities to sell our meat.
- It Dosent really affect us that much buy having a direct buy program would be nicer than taking to the sale barn and just taking a gamble when you direct market prices are much Better It seems I am at the Merci of the processors, price, and if they will even make time to do it.
- I have a desire to raise chickens, sheep, hogs, beef on a small scale and sell direct to consumers but have no model of value added inspected business to follow. I believe we need this type of business in rural Minnesota to add income to a diversified farm and add to rural economic development.
- We currently have all our direct-market meat processed at a USDA inspected facility that is 65 miles (one-way) away. This adds additional expense, time, and scheduling to our short farmer's market season. We are the only vendor selling meat at our area markets because of the difficulty with accessing meat processing. We are not sure how much longer we will direct-market meat, primarily due to the processing issues that we face in southwest Minnesota.
- Processing requires taking vacation from my off-farm job because it is so difficult to schedule. Of course I do it, but taking a real vacation would certainly improve my quality of life.
- I travel 60 miles each way and if i want usda plant its much farther, it stresses the animals and me.
- Each flock processed requires a round trip of 175 miles and 4 hours total time to BOTH deliver the live birds and to pick up the frozen processed product. This mileage and time cost is added into the cost to produce and thus adds to the selling price of the product.
- We need to schedule a trailer load so the cost of the trip is less per animal.

- For years a friend and business planning helpers have been trying to establish a USDA inspected processing facility in [City]. I hope it gets built before we retire, since we drive over an hour to the processor now...to deliver and then multiple times to pick up. It would do absolute wonders for local foods marketing in our community.
- @ 50 miles to either choice.
- We have access from our farm in [City] to a processor in [City], 30 + miles away, but we are sorry to have lost access to our two local processors in [City], 10 miles away, [Processor Name] & [Processor Name], neither of which will process lamb now. Our processor in [City] closes for domestic processing in November and December, so we have to have our animals ready by the end of October. This determines our lambing schedule, which then needs to be end of March, not optimum for us. I'm not clear about the difference between Custom Exempt and Equal-to in your survey. Our total direct marketing is 16-18 lambs to one state inspected processor.
- the state should make it much easier for producers to process and market their own meat directly through the farm. Too many restrictions make farming difficult for small farmers we need help do something.
- For poultry we travel 60 miles one way. For lambs and goats it is 2 hours or more one way.
- The lack of certified organic processing plants in MN severely limits our sales. The lack of E2 poultry plants severely limits our sales. We do have pretty good access to E2 for beef, sheep, goat, pig BUT then we can't get our own ground meat back -- all these plants are so big that their grinders mix our meat with other meat -- animals that have been fed GMOs, antibiotics, chemical dewormers, etc.
- We are very fortunate to have a good small beef, pork, lamb, bison processor 20 miles away. If we did not have a near processor we would have great difficulty doing any direct marketing. Even 50 miles would cut our business by 75%.
- Our demand for our meat FAR exceeds are capacity to produce which is largely limited by processing. We currently process poultry on-farm and the processing time is the primary limitation to increasing production. If we had access to an equal-to processor, we'd use them and increase our production by devoting the time and labor from on-farm processing to raising more birds.

- We basically have one choice for equal-to for hogs and sheep and their capacity is limited, thereby limiting our production.
- We currently travel 65 miles for processing. It is a long trip and we are concerned about the stress on the birds. Scheduling is difficult because there is a high demand for the inspection appointments. We are very limited as to which days are available.
- Drive 30 miles one-way to processor, while most customers are 30 miles in the opposite direction. They also stop processing other meats during deer season.
- We travel 26 miles round trip to a local processing plant. Up until this time all our sales have been word-of-mouth.
- It is a shame that inspected processing is the only way to sell meat at retail level. The non inspected process I use is far more personal and clean than the inspected processing that is available. The non inspected chickens, in particular, looks and sell much better than the inspected plants in our region. Why can't I sell this meat at our local organic food store?
- It doesn't [affect quality of life], but it affects my ability to grow my business.
- Health and well being is first and foremost what we look for in animals, land and human consumption. Consumers are wanting more farm to table relationships.....going back to pre war ways of living.
- Meat processing has to be done but when there are so many restrictions, like shearing the lambs to the skin, or even finding a processor at all that is local that we will stick with custom exempt for our lambs. We can be present for the butcher- maintaining our farm's animal welfare standards, retrieve their full fleece pelts and salt them right away, and make sure that everything is done the way we'd like. I would like to have more market options for our Icelandic lamb, like selling to Byerly's or Lund's however if it means I have to compromise my own farm values by stressing our livestock at all, I will just have to find another way to make it work, though finding customers can be challenging when they may only want certain cuts as opposed to a whole lamb. Mobile USDA slaughter would be a perfect option for our farm however I know the cost for the kill, cut, and wrap are potentially much higher and the lack of inspectors probably makes this option low on the priority list. I would like to have more options for meat processing that allow us to make sure our animals are respected up to their last moment and we can still make a living.

- Local processor takes only a small number of animals one day per week. Have traveled as far as 60 miles to get animals processed. Local preferred processor is only 5 miles from home. Access to meat processing allows me as a farmer to make a living off of my farm.
- The travel time to the processor adds about \$100 (per run) to the cost that I have to charge my customers. In addition, because the travel time is 1.5 hours, during the summer, quality can also be affected due to frosting of the packages in my coolers. I have had to buy additional protections for the coolers to get the meat back in decent quality. I am also unable to get certain cuts and flavor sausages that my customers ask for by going to the processor. It just gets very frustrating when you are trying so hard to raise a quality product and the processors that we are allowed to choose from know that they have us over a barrel and there is little choice that we have to change that. Also, there is a huge need for a USDA processor for rabbit!!!
- We had finally developed a solid sales market for our free range broilers and fryer and we were at a point where we were making a profit on our poultry operation. Then the poultry processor in [City] quit servicing small farms, like ours. We had no available processing within 125 miles. We have had to turn away customers for our poultry and it has set our local, free rang poultry business back. We are still building our rotationally grazed beef herd, making a substantial investment in fencing and cattle infrastructure, as well as adding lamb this year (we put in 3.5 miles of fence). As well as building a new chicken coop. We are concerned how access to equal to processing will impact our ability to process the meat we are producing. As farmers, we are making the investment on our farm to be able to have grass fed beef, lamb and free range poultry. We took 80 acres out corn production and planted perennial pastures and wetlands through a USDA NRCS conservation program. And yet we are at financial risk because there is not access to processing plants for the animals that we are producing on that land. If we felt secure of our access to processing we would further expand our cattle operations, taking another 100+ acres out of corn production and into pasture.