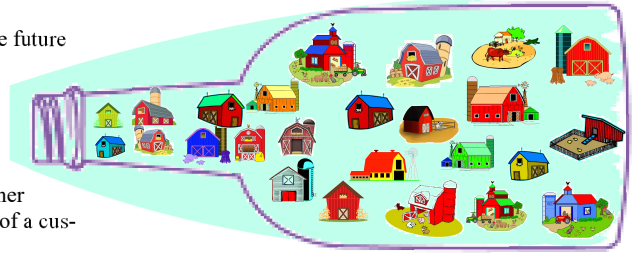


All Bottled Up

We continue to feel a worrisome squeeze being induced by the heavy demand for custom butchering services imposed upon a dwindling supply of providers. While maintaining rapport with as many shops as geographically possible does nothing to diminish this imbalance, it seems prudent to avoid putting too many eggs in one basket - especially when an opportunity is favorable for customers.

Yet the long-term prognosis reveals this concern to manifest itself as THE limiting impediment to the future potential of farm-to-fork. Farm-to-fork (FTF) competes for this limited capacity, not just with other farms, but also with the butcher shops own needs, hobby farmers, hunters, and from July through September, the total inundation of preferential capacity awarded to County Fair livestock - a captive customer base comprised primarily of hobby farms. A full-time farmer who recognizes the absolute economic necessity to schedule a full trailer of livestock - defined as 12 beef or 25 hogs - is now dealing with 10 month lead times. Of course, as you or I would do if we owned a high demand butcher shop, prices for custom processing are increasing rapidly and now represent a significant proportion of a customers total cost.



The nature of niche markets represents the willingness of some people to prioritize specific qualities above price alone. This willingness has limits. As a result, any overall price increase imposed upon these tenuously contemplative consumers is being captured by the processor, effectively washing out this potential for the farmer. This has become a new conundrum for FTF consumers and farmers alike. We recognize the essential role of local custom processors. Like any other business, future growth is commensurate to the income potential. Thus, in order to entice others to put themselves at risk as a custom processor, reward must be commensurate to this risk. Discussions with existing processors reveals the expense of unpalatable red-tape now built into food safety regulations. As is the case with small scale farming, regulations are drafted and legislated in the interests of agribusiness. There is little, if any acknowledgement regarding food safety benefits correlated to reduced volume, density and occurrence. Hence, the entrepreneur contemplating a new custom processing facility with weekly capacities of 40 cattle and 60 hogs is held to the same standards as a corporate slaughter plant, which in that same week will slaughter 35,000 cattle or 140,000 hogs. Additionally, vacated existing facilities cannot be purchased by surviving custom processors without rebuilding/upgrading to meet current regulations. To paraphrase the effect: Spend the money; increase capacity to justify the expense; relinquish perceived status as niche market; default to market which competes with conventional margins; fail. There appears to be no middle-ground market. You either compete with the likes of Tyson and Smithfield on volume alone or participate in a consumer-driven micro-niche.

I strive to provide accurate information in these newsletters, yet short of jumping into the fray, projecting hard numbers is next to impossible. The information I have gleaned is admittedly somewhat fast and loose, learned from intermittent discussions with several custom owners, all of whom are always pressed for time, yet willing to divulge bursts of frustration when this topic is put before them. The answer I've received from these owners is the same. They claim a new facility would cost several million dollars - an expense which cannot provide a return based on the lower volume which literally personifies their niche.

The Bigger Picture. Begging the Questions: *What are the food safety ramifications associated with volume, speed and frequency? As a consumer, do you prefer processing conditions which prevent contamination, or, processing conditions designed to allow sterilized collateral contamination as a necessary byproduct of efficiency?*

The answers, from the perspective of our legislative/political system, are displayed amidst mandated Administrative Code, created under the guise of consumer safety amidst the influence of vested industrial interests. It is for this reason that Citizen's United, Campaign Finance Reform, Gerrymandering and ALEC are all interjected into these newsletters. Industry is drafting legislation. Out of concern for reelection contributions, our legislators are drafting law - often verbatim - from these industry-written drafts.

The DATCP vehemently proclaims, with authority, that pathogenic contamination and disease are indifferent to volume, speed and frequency. Yet outside the political sphere, our vast understanding of biology, pathogens and disease vectors clearly illuminate the irrefutable influence induced upon livestock and processing by the attributes of volume, speed and frequency.

As the gatekeeper deciding which foods are safe for your family, your decision is one of Offense or Defense.

Offense: Methods designed to mitigate pathogens via biologically-optimized volume, speed and frequencies.

Defense: Methods designed to chemically sterilize expected collateral contamination via industry-optimized volume, speed and frequency.

Plain straight talk: Manure Happens. (Please...substitute the *real* word for greatest effect. In this context, it is indeed non-vulgar and appropriate).

Manure happens to be in the intestines of all livestock. **Manure** happens to find it's way onto the exterior of livestock. When a high volume of fast growing livestock are confined perpetually in an unnatural high density environment - **manure** happens to feed pathogens. When these same livestock are processed at optimized industrial speeds, **manure** happens to land on the meat. When some meats are brine injected, **manure** happens to be pushed deeply into the meat.

We can prevent **manure** from happening on the farm and the processor by limiting volume, speed and frequency.
Or, as the DATCP has sanctioned, we can all eat **manure**, as long as the **manure** has been technologically sterilized.

The latter represents the potential that exists within every conventional meat product processed under the industrial guise of food safety. Your *choices* remain:

- 1). **On-Farm Processing: Illegal**
- 2). **Local Custom Processing: Regulated towards Extinction**
- 3). **Supermarket: Conform to Sanctioned Industrial Standards**

Constituents are not approving these actions. Our WI/IL legislators aren't listening to constituents because constituents don't fund their reelection. The **ONLY** way to stop this is to overturn Citizen's United, implement Campaign Finance Reform and follow Iowa's lead on non-partisan Redistricting.

Takeaway: There's strength in numbers, yet the minuscule number of smaller scale farmers and shop owners alone cannot induce change. Change will require an overwhelming noise induced by legions of consumer constituents demanding action on Citizen's United, Campaign Financing and Non-Partisan Redistricting.

