

NC Choices' 2nd Carolina Meat Conference Listening Session

December 4, 2012

Partners: NC Choices (*Casey McKissick*) and NCDA&CS Meat&Poultry Division (*Don Delozier*). Held at Winmock Conference Center, Kernersville, during the 2nd Carolina Meat Conference.

About 70 people attended. Expertise from the state and federal regulatory community was present including representatives of USDA FSIS and NCDA&CS Food&Drug Division, Meat&Poultry Division and Marketing Division and NC DHHS Division of Public Health Food Protection Branch.

facilitated by Shivaugn Rayl, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

NC Local Sustainable Foods Council members present: Uli Benewitz, Weeping Radish; Nancy Creamer, Center for Environmental Farming Systems; John Day, ShiDay Consulting; Debbie Hamrick, NC Farm Bureau

- Lower packaging costs through a buying cooperative or some other mechanism to enable farmers to buy larger lots at lower prices, especially for cardboard boxes and egg cartons.
- One size does not fit all regulations are problematic for local meats processors and producers. Pressure from outside consumer activist groups seeking to make all meat risk-free is pushing regulations that are difficult for small plants to meet, such as zero tolerance for pathogens that are destroyed during proper food preparation. Concerns regarding campylobacter performance standards for meat and poultry and that USDA HACCP plan standards have been geared to large-scale meat processing plants in response to outside pressure. Requirements are causing smaller plants problems because tolerance is zero. Small plants may receive a few animals from one farm, and a few animals from another farm. The quality and sanitary condition of the animal can vary significantly. USDA approved substances such as hydrochloric acid, hydrogen peroxide and other products may be used during processing to eliminate pathogens, but some farms/farmers do not want the chemicals to come in contact with the poultry and meats they have produced and are marketing as natural food products.
- Small livestock producers are not acknowledged in the food system. There is no feedback loop into Washington and elsewhere from customers who want local meat.
- Could there be a comparable standard based on performance that meets metrics, but is not prescriptive? For example, this poultry is processed without these additives and it meets USDA standards. Could there be another standard tier?
- Affordable product liability insurance for producers is difficult or impossible to locate.
- Logistical issues of moving local foods profitably for the farmer and convenient store door delivery for the restaurant or retailer. Aggregation points in the market have not yet materialized. Overnight, 2-day service is difficult to obtain.
- Farmers want to receive all animal parts back from the processor, including swine heads, which is a marketable product. (CHECK ABOUT LETTER W/Delozier) thought the conversation was that one producer had worked with his inspector and facility to get those heads cleaned out and returned to him while in compliance with the regs, but that other producers were not able to get their heads because the inspectors and facilities didn't know the options available to make the

heads compliant. Maybe the letter from Don DeLozier referenced in the notes addresses these details, but I didn't want the gist to get lost in the summary.

- Develop a virtual location for small farmers and processors to be able to log issues as they arise.
- Assess the size of local foods in North Carolina to enable farmers to develop business and financial planning for farming operations and in developing marketing plans.
- Provide access to business assistance resources (state and local) and education/training for local foods businesses.
- Facilitate business incubation and supporting emergent entrepreneurs.
- Provide marketing assistance for local foods businesses, especially raising consumer awareness of local foods and local farms/farmers.
- Opportunity for small farmers focusing on local meats to join together as a group to create one voice for legislative, regulatory and marketing issues.