



# Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources and Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture South Deerfield, MA

Use a data driven approach to identify cost-effective solutions that have the most impact on the regional meat supply.

## AMS GRANTS AWARDED

2012 Federal State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) Grant for \$32,060

Project types: General Market Analysis, Enterprise Planning, General Business Planning, Education & Outreach

## HISTORY OF BUSINESS OR PROJECT

Based in South Deerfield, Massachusetts, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, or CISA, was incorporated in 1999. Their mission is strengthening farms and engaging the community to build the local food economy. Their innovative program, Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown®, has helped start similar projects in many other parts of the country. They also provide extensive technical assistance; offer zero-interest emergency loans for farmers and farm businesses impacted by weather emergencies; partner on a community investment fund that provides financing to farm and food businesses; and support food access through a low-income senior Community Supported Agriculture and Massachusetts' SNAP-rebate program.

CISA's long-term work with farmers and ranchers and their desire to have more access to slaughter and value-added processing services led to their project, in which they researched meat producer and buyer needs and explored models for increasing local meat processing in western Massachusetts, specifically the Pioneer Valley. It was a collaborative research project between the Massachusetts

Department of Agricultural Resources and CISA, along with business students from the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

## WHY THEY CHOSE TO APPLY FOR AN AMS GRANT/WHAT AN AMS GRANT MEANT FOR THEIR BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION?

The project would not have gotten off the ground were it not for the grant. It leveraged the organization's capacity in very valuable ways. Several years later, CISA still relies on the information produced through the grant project in providing business assistance to meat producers, sourcing support to buyers, and delivering value-chain facilitation services. It also greatly advanced the organization's understanding that a broader range of solutions needed to be understood and explored beyond adding more meat processors.

## KEY IMPACTS OF THE GRANT, SHORT-TERM AND LONGER-TERM

The project team completed an in-depth research report and a fillable feasibility template for others to use (linked in the references on the next page). They found there were other potential ways to support local meat production that did not include building new meat processing infrastructure, such as aggregated transport and distribution. By working with graduate students, the project kept costs down yet still produced high quality

research. The final products were useful not just for producers/processors in the project region, but also provided useful plans/templates for the rest of the country. The key recommendations generated in the final report were to:

- Establish a trade association for meat producers and processors to better coalesce the business interests of parties in the value chain and advance an efficient and thriving market for local meat products in the Pioneer Valley.
- Reduce transportation costs incurred by producers and expand post-slaughter processing options by delivering meat products from local processors back to producers farms' and facilitating access to regional secondary processing facilities.
- Establish fee-for-service meat processing at a local commercial kitchen for making small batches of value-added products for producers in the Pioneer Valley unable to meet volume commitments required by existing processors.

According to Project Director Margaret Christie, "The research project empowered our team to establish stronger relationships with the existing meat processors and producers in their region."

Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders clarified the needs of meat processors and producers in this region and how to best address them. The team has responded to the findings, particularly around technical assistance, such as understanding carcass quality and a range of other related topics. CISA's everyday technical assistance often focuses on business management, marketing, and troubleshooting, and research projects like this provide critical staff knowledge that improves the assistance CISA provides to farmers and the businesses that source from them.

Similarly, the project team included both processors and producers, which created opportunities for connections and mutual learning between the two groups. Following the project, CISA offered multiple workshops for meat producers on topics including meat cutting and improving communications with the processor.

## WHERE THEY WOULD LIKE TO GO NEXT

Thus far, the project team has not pursued the specific recommendations in the report. More slaughter and butcher facilities have come online since the report was written, and other entrepreneurs are solving gaps by

aggregating meat or offering meat buying clubs, among other efforts. The project team was not confident that a separate meat trade association was sustainable, yet CISA has taken on some of that technical assistance (one-on-one, workshops and referrals) through their technical assistance programming. Staff are also more skilled at troubleshooting producer/processor relationships than they were before this project.

This project helped a local shared-use kitchen gain approval for processing certain meat products. Additionally, two retail-exempt butchers opened in the region, one of which utilized CISA's expertise gained through this project in their financing application.

Local institutions have pursued innovative approaches to sourcing more locally and regionally grown meat. These include a partnership through which several colleges will jointly purchase whole animals during the slow winter slaughterhouse season and the creation of products using underutilized local fish species.

## REFERENCES/LINKS

<https://www.buylocalfood.org/slaughter-and-meat-processing/>

[https://www.buylocalfood.org/upload/resource/CISA\\_MeatReport\\_2013.pdf](https://www.buylocalfood.org/upload/resource/CISA_MeatReport_2013.pdf)

<https://www.buylocalfood.org/feasibility-template-for-small-scale-meat-processor-2013/>

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network  
Rebecca Thistlethwaite  
Email: [thistler@oregonstate.edu](mailto:thistler@oregonstate.edu)

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service  
Samantha Schaffstall  
Email: [samantha.schaffstall@usda.gov](mailto:samantha.schaffstall@usda.gov)



NICHE MEAT PROCESSOR  
ASSISTANCE NETWORK

This case study was created in fulfillment of a cooperative research agreement between the Marketing Services

Division of the Agricultural Marketing Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA AMS) and Oregon State University's Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network (NMPAN).

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