



## Southern Tier West Salamanca, NY

Use a feasibility study to determine if new meat processing facilities are warranted, and identify ways to remove barriers for local meat producers.

### **AMS GRANTS AWARDED**

Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) 2014  
Planning Grant for \$24,750

Project types: Enterprise Planning, General  
Business Planning

### **HISTORY OF BUSINESS OR PROJECT**

In 1969, the Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua County legislatures in New York adopted a resolution creating the Southern Tier West (STW) Regional Planning and Development Board. The STW mission is to coordinate and enhance planning and development activities in southwestern New York to promote social, physical, and economic development in these counties.

STW's project sought to assess the local meat industry, uncover its challenges, and determine whether opening a new red meat processing facility in the area was warranted. STW set out to quantify the following key assumptions: 1) that demand for inspected meat processing facilities and services exceeded supply; and 2) that customer service, pricing, and value-added processing of those existing facilities were below the level that farmers desired.

STW contracted with Kitchen Table Consultants, a food business consulting firm, to conduct and write the study. After determining that it would not be feasible

to build a new plant, the planning team redirected their efforts to develop a set of recommendations to address some of the regional meat supply chain challenges.

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

STW indicated that while their agency would have conducted some sort of assessment, the study would not have been as robust without the AMS grant funds. The funds allowed STW to hire an expert consulting firm that went far beyond the agency's internal data collection capacity by compiling and analyzing secondary data and collecting primary data through onsite interviews with processors. A less detailed study would have resulted in bias towards the meat producers' needs without understanding the context of the processors' capacity and challenges. The AMS grant also freed up STW staff resources to do other food system development work, such as explore regional food hub concepts.

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

Most of STW and their local Cornell Cooperative Extension programming is on the farmer/rancher side. The work of Kitchen Table Consultants expanded

relationships to meat processors, distributors, and others in the regional meat supply chain. They visited them in person and built relationships and trust.

“The turn that the entire project took, away from building a new meat processing facility, was a big ‘aha’ for us. Finding out that there was not a need for a new facility and that existing plants had excess capacity at certain times of the year really challenged our original assumptions,” Project Director Kimberly Mendola shared.

The final report suggested some approaches to address gaps in the regional meat supply chain:

1. Creating a variety of tools and projects to improve meat processing in the region, including programs to bring the local meat processors together for roundtable discussions. Additional programming could include education modules to unify farmers’ needs with what the processors can deliver.
2. Raising capital to assist local processors through a voluntary program designed to ensure their capacity, whether that be via equipment upgrades, succession planning, butchery training programs, or business analysis.

Overall, communication between farmers and processors improved over the course of this project and participants also gained a better grasp of new service providers. Although there are still some farmers who would like to see a new plant, most of the participants understand that a new facility just does not make economic sense.

## **WHERE THEY WOULD LIKE TO GO NEXT**

Kimberly LaMendola the former Project Director, suggested, among other ideas, working more closely with entities like Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) on projects to educate consumers on the affordability/ accessibility of buying meat in bulk. She also built a website called MeatSuite that connects farmers with consumers. By working with CCE, she has learned about other creative solutions for those that don’t have freezer space, such as CCE’s Meat Locker pilot project.

With this research in their back pocket, STW is now focused on developing a regional food hub. They are also networking producers and processors via a regional agriculture industry summit that will feature a specialty focus on the regional meat supply chain. Additionally,

with the recently enhanced New York State Farm-to-School funding streams, several school districts are now connected with local meat producers as sources for part of their need for ground beef and pre-made beef patties.

## **REFERENCES/LINKS**

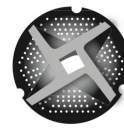
<http://www.kitchentableconsultants.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/meatprocessingstudy.pdf>

<https://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/network/meat-processing>

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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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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