

# Local meats Extension outreach in North Dakota

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*The public wants to know “where their food comes from.” As NDSU Extension, we have the opportunity and responsibility to assist with regulatory interpretation, tell the production story, and improve communication and expectations of consumers regarding the meat we produce in North Dakota livestock operations. NDSU Extension personnel and efforts reached producer to consumer audiences and provided interactive webinars and timely, relevant resources across the livestock/meat supply chain.*

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## Summary

Consumer interest in local meats has been increasing with emphasis on farmers markets, direct marketing, and the desire of consumers to have a better understanding of their family’s protein choices. This has resulted in NDSU developing an Extension program to provide resources and guidance to producers wishing to pursue locally-driven marketing systems. Outreach focus has included online webinar series, in-person lectures/seminars, publications, and conference presentations to provide information, determine appropriate current and future approaches, and develop tools that match clientele requests.

## Introduction

There often is a disconnect between producers and consumers. However, it is apparent, particularly during and post-pandemic, that we have an increased need to connect our producers with resources on how to provide safe and high-quality meat from the purchase of an animal for consumption. Additionally, there is

an increase in North Dakota meat processing plants, resulting in a need for improved outreach and resources for our livestock producers to succeed with merchandising local foods. The North Dakota Department of Agriculture has led efforts to build farmers market acceptance and increase consumer and producer awareness of the benefits of fresh, locally grown products. Outreach accomplished by NDSU Extension by Travis Hoffman and Isaac Brunkow continued dialogue for producer/consumer education that spans the livestock supply chain.

## Procedures

In order to develop appropriate vision for Extension programming, a needs assessment survey was distributed via several producer organizations in North Dakota and Minnesota and through NDSU affiliated social media accounts. The goal of the survey was to collect data on topics, questions, and concerns producers have over marketing locally produced meat. The research participants (n = 12) identified primary emphasis topics: 1) navigation of regulations; 2) marketing strategies; 3) how to get started; and 4) potential profitability of direct marketing systems.

In 2022 and 2023, Local Meats Webinar Series were conducted online via Zoom involving a wide variety of panelists. The topics and panelists were organized and coordinated by Hoffman and Lindy Berg. The 2022 panelists covered topics including Getting Livestock Ready for Harvest, Retail Meats and Inventory Management, Meat and Poultry in Farmer’s Markets and Farm to School, Poultry Meat and Egg Production, and Building Your Consumer Relationships for Success (Table 1). These garnered a live audience ranging from 10 to 28 with a total of 95 attendees over the duration, and a total of 881 views as of August 1, 2023 from our NDSU Extension’s YouTube page. A summary of the topics and panelists are provided below.

### Getting Livestock Ready for Harvest –May 3, 2022 (27 attendees; 389 YouTube views)

*Summary:* Initial discussion was striving for appropriately finished animals to direct market livestock. Meeting consumer expectations can be species specific for market weight and timing. Underfeeding can lead to detrimental quality, while over-finished animals result in decreased yield and lamb quality challenges. Too light or too much market weight and finish can be extremely detrimental to the end product. The panelists also stressed that finishing and time to finish is breed and purpose dependent and that each operation needs to cater to its best timetable for their production goals.

### Meat and Poultry in Farmers Markets and Farm to School – May 10, 2022 (16 attendees; 107 YouTube views)

*Summary:* Local foods are a great alternative to heavily processed

and packaged foods, and schools have implemented local fruits and vegetables into their menus. Opportunity exists for livestock producers to build demand for their meat and poultry products through schools and farmers markets. The panelists detailed experiences facilitating their product through the supply chain to local farmers markets and school lunch programs.

**Retail Meats and Inventory Management – May 17, 2022**  
(14 attendees; 140 YouTube views)

*Summary:* With many modern supermarkets running short of items, it can seem like a hassle and a huge struggle to manage a stocked inventory when first starting out direct marketing meat. With the advent

of some services, technology, and organizational strategies, many of the headaches can be prevented or alleviated. Our panelists analyzed strategies and technologies that they utilize to keep themselves organized and how to best keep their customers stocked with locally grown meat.

**Building Your Consumer Relationships for Success – May 24, 2022**  
(28 attendees; 102 YouTube views)

*Summary:* With the increased adoption of social media, it is more important than ever that animal agriculture create a trusting relationship with consumers and the public. Face-to-face interactions are still important, especially if direct marketing products off your opera-

tion. The panelists discussed how they cultivate producer-customer relationships that not only benefit their operations but help to educate consumers about the positive aspects associated with animal agriculture.

**Poultry Meat and Egg Production – May 31, 2022**  
(10 attendees; 143 YouTube views)

*Summary:* One of the easiest and most efficient livestock species to start with is poultry production. Poultry can be housed in a much smaller environment when compared to cattle, sheep, goats, and swine. Food safety, environmental impact, and overall health and welfare are the principal areas of concern when it comes to any livestock species but is especially emphasized

**Table 1. NDSU Extension 2022-2023 Local Meats Webinar Series; titles, dates and presenters.**

<b>2022 Local Meats Webinar Series, led by Travis Hoffman and Lindy Berg</b>		
Getting Livestock Ready for Harvest	May 3, 2022	Lisa Pederson, NDSU Extension CJ and Calli Thorne, Triangle M Ranch and Feedlot Daryl Lies, 6 in 1 Meats
Meat and Poultry in Farmer’s Markets and Farm to School	May 10, 2022	Jan Stankiewicz, NDSU Extension Kristine Kostuck, North Dakota Department of Agriculture Deb Egeland, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
Retail Meats and Inventory Management	May 17, 2022	Ron and Beth Wolff, Wolff Suffolks Joana Friesz, Friesz Livestock Isaac Brunkow, Brunkow Family Lamb Spencer Wirt, 6 in 1 Meats
Building Your Consumer Relationships for Success	May 24, 2022	Annie Carlson, Morning Joy Farm Isaac Brunkow, Brunkow Family Lamb
Poultry Meat and Egg Production	May 31, 2022	Penny Nester, NDSU Extension Wayne Martin, UMN Extension Julie Garden-Robinson, NDSU Extension Adam and Apryl Mawby, Garden Dwellers Ranch
<b>2023 Local Meats Webinar Series, led by Isaac Brunkow and Travis Hoffman</b>		
Regulations	May 2, 2023	Nathan Kroh, North Dakota Department of Agriculture Rhonda Amundson, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
Building a Contractual Relationship with a Locker	May 9, 2023	Ron and Beth Wolff, Wolff Suffolks Trish Feiring, Feiring Cattle Company Spencer Wirt, general manager, 6 in 1 Meats
Finding Your Niche Market/ Starting a Farmer’s Market	May 16, 2023	Simone Wai, Red River Farmers Market Ron and Beth Wolff, Wolff Suffolks Kelsey Krapp, The Bison Ranch Ashley Bruner, Dakota Angus Beef
Inventory Management	May 23, 2023	James Maiocco, Barn2Door Glenn Brunkow, Brunkow Family Lamb Shane Wendel, Wendel Livestock

with poultry production. Our experts provided information on the regulations, resources, and experiences they had with poultry meat and egg production.

Our NDSU Extension webinar series resulted in a wide variety of discussion occurring with several thought-provoking questions directed from the online audience that were answered in real time by the panelists. A deliverable was a solid reference for livestock producers, and development of a network of people with common goals to adhere to regulations and build consumer satisfaction with locally-produced proteins.

In 2023, another series of webinars was conducted building off the 2022 inaugural outreach. Topics evolved from the previous year with new panelists offering fresh insight or covering new topics that had potential benefit for North Dakota producers. Discussion was advantageous for producers looking to expand their operations to include a local meat marketing strategy. The topics and panelists were organized and coordinated by Brunkow under the direction of Hoffman (Table 1).

### **Regulations – May 2, 2023**

(74 YouTube views)

*Summary:* The first of this year's webinar series started off delving into the regulatory stipulations to adhere to for selling locally produced meat. This is a necessity to ensure health and safety regulations are followed. The panelists provided insight into the various levels of inspection, differences in poultry, and how to get involved with providing locally produced meat to schools.

### **Building a Contractual Relationship with a Locker – May 9, 2023**

(49 YouTube views)

*Summary:* It is paramount to have a working relationship with your processor when setting up a local meats marketing operation. The panelists discussed struggles and techniques they have developed when working with processors, how to navigate management change, and provided insight from a processor's viewpoint.

### **Finding Your Niche Market/Starting a Farmers Market – May 16, 2023**

(27 YouTube views)

*Summary:* Standing out from the crowd can be the difference between success and failure. In addition, having a market to sell through can create new opportunities to advertise and merchandise product. The panelists explained what makes their operations successful, their experiences with farmers markets, and what goes into managing a large farmers market like the Red River Farmers Market in Fargo, North Dakota.

### **Inventory Management –**

**May 23, 2023** (59 YouTube views)

*Summary:* Managing meat product inventory can be a challenge, and if done improperly can be detrimental to customer relationships and unsafe to public health. Our panelists discussed strategies they have utilized, management software and technologies they have used, and the importance of being able to branch out their product lines for retail and foodservice.

The 2023 webinar series included perspectives from parties not directly involved with processing or producing livestock, such as those involved in organizing marketplaces (i.e., Red River Farmers Market and Barn2Door online marketplace). While numbers were over 50 attendees for online presentations, 209 views on YouTube have been documented as of August, 2023.

Educational outreach in North Dakota increased through efforts conducted with our local meats research and Extension program at NDSU. A post-webinar summary was conducted to evaluate "overall usefulness of the 2022 Local Meat Production — Farm to Market Webinar Series to your work" in September 2022. A mean rating of 4.02 out of 5 ( $n = 59$ ) was aggregated corresponding to webinar participants considered the webinars Very Useful. Directly following webinars, attendees were asked to respond with their agreement to "I learned information on Local Meats from today's webinar," with a mean

of 4.0 (agree) out of 5 ( $n = 32$ ); and "I will make changes to my operation based on information learned from today's webinar," with a 3.5 out of 5 ( $n = 32$ ) response indicating a response between neutral and agree. The four-month post-survey respondents were asked, "since attending the 2022 Local Meat Production - Farm to Market Webinar Series, have you made any changes to your operation or marketing based upon information you obtained from the topics presented during the workshop?" A total of 59% ( $n = 44$ ) responded that they have made changes in marketing or to their operation, showing transformational change through the implementation of new ideas.

With addition to the aforementioned two successful series of online seminars, further accomplishments include the creation of a beef carcass model curriculum and factsheets benefiting producers, processors, and consumers in North Dakota. Brunkow attended conferences and provided presentations to augment dissemination of information representing NDSU Extension. Future NDSU sponsored workshops to provide continuing education to our food supply chain may focus on producer marketing strategies, economic viability of direct marketing, retail and foodservice cuts for livestock species, consumer focused preparation, and meat quality education. Further future deliverables include a custom-exempt focused beef carcass pricing model and research on lamb feeding economics to benefit marketing and operation finances. The NDSU Extension YouTube channel and NDSU Extension Livestock Facebook page include more information about Local Meats Outreach.

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