Today on across the fence the growing interest in local food means more Food Processing in Vermont. As a result of educational workshops are being developed for meat processors and producers that focus on everything from quality cuts to quality care of animals. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson. Local food is a part of a growing economy. There are jobs in producing and processing local food. Specially in beef, pork and other meat production. To find out more about this growing part of our economy and about educational workshops for producers and processors as I'm joined by two guests. Jenna Colby is the outreach coordinator of the pasture network at UVM's Center for sustainable agriculture and alongside Jenn is Chelsea Lewis with the Vermont agency of agriculture welcome to both of you. Jen maybe you could start by telling us what we know about the number of animal producers in Vermont and the number of processors?

Jen.: The number of animal producers are about according to the last AG senses about 6800 total farms in Vermont and 3000-3500 farms that include livestock that would include dairy and all other different kinds of livestock as well. As far as producers I believe we have seven.

Chelsea.: We have seven inspected large animal processing facilities in the state.

Judy.: Would you say that that's enough or do you think there's room for more? It's obviously a growing industry.

Chelsea.: It is a growing industry and we definitely recognize that there's going to be the need for more processing capacity as the industry grows. We are working actively with entrepreneurs to increase the numbers of facilities. Particularly custom facilities so if farmers are raising animals for their own use they can use a custom facility in that takes some of the pressure off of our commercially inspected facilities as well.

Judy.: When it comes processing of the different kinds of processors?

Chelsea.: There are as I mentioned we have federally inspected facilities in the state. We have six of those. We also have in Vermont State inspection programs so we're one of only two states in New England that still have our state inspection program although our program is equal to the Federal program the Federal law says that those facilities cannot ship mean across state lines. We have one facility that state inspected.. We also have a
state inspected mobile poultry processing unit. It goes directly to the farm and they process farmers poultry for them.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about how important that is because that's a newer aspect and it's an interesting one because it solves a lot of problems?

Chelsea.: Yes farmers like that they don't have to travel and it works very nicely with poultry. It's a little bit more complicated with large animals. There are some large animal mobile units throughout the country they've had varying degrees of success but certainly with the mobile unit there booked solid so they're doing a great job.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about Vermont inspection vs. Federal inspection? If you want to sell your meat across the country it has to be federally inspected?

Chelsea.: Yes it does.

Judy.: But you can process meat and sell it in the state with the state inspection?

Chelsea.: Yes.

Judy.: And if you don't have an inspector then the meat is for your own personal use is that correct?

Jenn.: Exactly

Judy.: What types of animals are processed through these different facilities?

Jen.: Most of the plants are doing beef and pork and lamb. My understanding is the Westminster facility is the only USDA inspected facility for poultry as well. Some of the different plants will focus on particular livestock vs. others as their specialty but most of them will do all the large animals.

Judy.: What's the purpose of the workshop series that you're offering?

Chelsea.: We're really trying to bring producers and processors together as the broader meat industry in Vermont to address of the issues they have to face together to grow that industry. We're hoping that one of the ways to increase the slaughter capacity and the state is to increase efficiency through strategic problem solving and all these folks working together two increase the number of animals getting into the market.

Judy.: We have some slides here that we are looking at. Tell me a little bit about the creative problem solving that you're talking about?

Chelsea.: A couple of the issues that farmers talk to us about are the quality of cuts. They need to have a high quality product to bring to the market specially the regional Boston and New York markets there looking for premium product. Getting better communication back to the plants in terms of what they're looking for. Other things include seasonality. You want to talk a bit about seasonality issues Jenn?

Jenn.: Absolutely. This is a little bit of the interface with how we promote both local economic development grass based farming local food movement and all these things
together because typically the cycle has been to raise grass fed animals through the summer and ship them to the processor in the fall. That has created a huge bottleneck. Part of our educational process is how do you grasp based farmers produce animals in the winter with stored feed that still fits the grass based model. How do they produce a consistent product for those high end markets? Or just the everyday customer how do they minimize those seasonal variations. That's part of what we talked about a little bits at our first workshop which is what the slides are from.

Judy.: As you mentioned if everyone is doing the same schedule then obviously have there's going to be a backlog at the slaughter facility and if you don't have a reservation? I don't know. You're out of luck.

Chelsea.: Our producers have done a great job planning in advance. Often they have to book a slaughter date a year and advanced. We recognize that is difficult especially when you have weather like this and your production schedule ends up off. Producers have done a great job and processors are also doing a great job too trying to fit people in but we hope more communication between these two groups through these workshops will lead to a pattern of processors and producers working together because the solutions are going to come from them they're not going to come from us.

Judy.: Formal processor standpoint do they understand that there is a growing market for a local produce and local meats? How can they adjust what is there doing to meet those needs of the quality cuts in that kind of thing?

Chelsea.: I think a lot of our processes are also producers. We're just at royal butcher yesterday and he's dealing with the same issue of how to lead bring my product to market and how tall and make that product profitable and how to lead tell the story of the animals that are raising. One thing that more processes are doing are looking at third party certifications up whether that be organic animal welfare approved of or other ways right on the packaging they can put a label to to tell the story of the farm and of the processor. I think that's one way they really are teaming up to make a nice impact on the marketplace.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about how important that is to the marketplace? Are you finding that the consumers are willing to pay more for that kind of certification for the kind of story that you are talking about?

Jenn.: Yes actually one of the additional workshops is going to be in July at mountain Meadows farm. They're hosting the beef producers summer social which is the third one in our series and mountain Meadows farm ships exclusively to a whole foods and they do a third party certification. It's a good agricultural practices and they are producing very specific for a market that is willing to pay more knowing that the farm is meeting the chain of good practices.

Judy.: Tell me about some of the other issues that are touched on in some of the workshops?

Chelsea.: One coming up on June 25 will be talking a lot about the Vermont humane handling program. We're the only state in the country that has a humane handling program. All of our plants have to have him mean handling Program it's. Those plans are now being reviewed by a third party consultant who is an expert on him in handling. We will be talking about that. As consultant who is also developing a training program so that all of the plant managers can train their employees on humane handling.
Judy.: Because that was an issue a couple years ago in one slaughter facility that was actually shut down.

Chelsea.: It was an issue so out of that I think all of the processors came together and realized they wanted. It helps their business
If they can treat these animals well and they do really care about animal welfare and humane handling. So the processors came forward and all wrote these plans. Will be talking about that with the producers because if the producers can spread the word that Vermont processors are a humane place to bring animals it's just going to help the Vermont brand and everyone is going to benefit by the sale of more Vermont meat.

Judy.: And that's actually huge for the producers in itself as far as I know I've talked to many farmers who are very concerned about where they can take their animals because of how they're treated. And how far they have to truck them or not.

Chelsea.: Yes we will be walking through it will be a Royal butcher and we'll be walking through the plant in royal going to show us some of the changes he's made with this third party consultant that was funded by the agency. We brought Erica Voag here to help all of the plants with their humane handling. Royal made some significant changes and paid some significant money to make those changes so we're excited to show producers the type of changes that have been made at plants across a state with humane handling mind.

Judy.: You also mentioned of one of your workshops one of the more popular aspects of the workshop was in cuts?

Jenn.: It has been in the conversations back and forth between cutting for different audiences and some of the farmers are shipping out to a store that will cut down from a larger primal which is a sub smaller than 1/4 or 1/2 the two main cut the gets cut and estates from their at that sort of size. Some of the farmers are going direct to farmers markets so they need a stake of a certain size because the state that's huge isn't going to work for their customer base so those kinds of conversations and those kinds of communications with cut sheets and having good relationships is really huge because if the processor doesn't cut it the way the farmer needs then the farmer stuck with a lot of meat and if the farmer doesn't understand how to communicate what they need or even understand what the cutting options are you can end up with a whole lot of meat that is wonderful meat that isn't going to go anywhere or is going to be consumed by the farmer when they really want to sell it. It behooves everyone to try to work together and build that communication. So much of that is meeting one another and doing over food. We have lunch of every one of these workshops have some good food and it breaks down the barriers.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about what the farmer does need to know about this whole process because it's more than just I want to raise grass fed beef because you have to know who your market is?

Chelsea.: It actually is pretty simple if you want to sell your meat then you have to bring it to a commercially inspected facility. There are ways if you want to sell a live animal and you can bring it to a custom facility but really if you're producing at the commercial scale your option is to bring it to and inspected facility. Certainly call the agency would love talking to producers and helping them figure out their market channels and how to bring their product to the consumer because there certainly is a growing demand.
Judy.: From the consumer standpoint when you go to the store and seem a package that says Vermont beef you can be assured that it has been inspected?

Chelsea.: Yes.

Judy.: Which is a huge issue for a lot of people are wondering if this local but doesn't meet all the inspection needs?

Chelsea.: Yes if you see the mark of an inspection on that package then you can be assured that it has been inspected and if a plant is operating under inspection there's an inspector there the whole time that they're working so you can be sure that it was done right.

Judy.: Do you see there's going to be more producers of local meats in the future?

Jenn.: Absolutely. Just as an example one we were doing the first workshop there were three growing markets for beef right at that time. Immediately there are opportunities for people shipping two grass fed and one organic grass fed marketer Coleader broker. They were all looking. Some of those folks can tour workshops because they're looking for producers to be able to ship to them and this is just three opportunities right there but there's going to be more and more.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit again about the different workshops that are coming up? There's one and June aid tell me about that one?

Jenn.: The one June '25 at royal butcher will be the one that's focusing on third party adding value through third party certification and humane handling. Some of those conversations the one July 30th will be beef producers summer social at mountain Meadows farm. I think there's going to be a steamship round of beef and some other great barbecue opportunities too. There a larger grass fed farm and they ship exclusively to whole foods as I said so that is a different scale so there's a real educational process around going from a small amount of animals to shipping to a much larger customer and then the 1 September 10th.

Chelsea.: September 10 will be down in Westminster and will take a tour of the brand New Westminster meets plant. Our newest plant in the state. We'll also be unveiling them results of a marketing study and how we can get more New England raised beef into schools and universities and hospitals and other institutions so that'll be a great regional opportunity.

Judy.: If people are interested in these events what should they do?

Jenn.: They're welcome the checkout our web site which describes each of the workshops and we're going to be posting photos from the workshops as well. That website is vtmeat.blogspot.com or their welcome to give me a call at (802)-656-0858 we can get them registered and would love to have folks.

Judy.: Anybody that's interested and the topic is encouraged to give you a call?

Jenn.: Absolutely.
Chelsea.: Yes please.

Judy.: Thank you both for being with me. That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we'll see you again next time on across the fence.

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