



This Little Piggy Went to Market:

A Panel Discussion on the Challenges and Opportunities in the Supply Chain
To Bring Local, Humanely-Raised Meats to the Consumer

Friday, October 7, 2011
10 AM to 12 PM

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Co-convened with Marilyn Anthony of the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable
Agriculture and Ann Karlen of Fair Food

Welcome and Introductions

Alison Hastings, Senior Environmental Planner at DVRPC, welcomed speakers and participants. She reviewed DVRPC's ongoing and upcoming projects, including the current Food System Implementation Grant program and future county-oriented work. Alison also announced that DVRPC is receiving an APA-PA Chapter award and has been nominated for an APA National Planning Excellence Award for *Eating Here: Greater Philadelphia's Food System Plan*. The next Food System Stakeholder Committee meeting will be co-convened with Peggy Fogarty-Harnish and Bob Noble on the topic of Co-op solutions.

One-Minute Reports

Stakeholder Committee members gave one minute reports on current activities and upcoming events.

Opening Remarks

Ann Karlen, Executive Director of [Fair Food](#), showed a short film about the meat production system transitioning from small family farms to industrial production and back to small family farms again. The video was produced by Chipotle and can be found [here](#). Ann remarked that with willing buyers, farmers can utilize small scale meat production systems. She provided examples of two farms, Polyface Farm in Virginia and Sweet Stem Farm in Pennsylvania. Both farms have contracts with one restaurant chain seeking the same product, however; each farm has a different story about its flow of production and sale price of its meat.

Panel Discussion

Marilyn Anthony, Eastern Regional Director of [PASA](#), moderated a panel discussion that featured:

- Professor Tom Parsons from the [New Bolton Center](#) at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine;
- Phil Landis from [Sweet Stem Farm](#) in Lititz, PA;

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- Jay Smucker of [Smucker's Meats](#) in Mount Joy, PA; and
- Jason Belleau, the Meat Coordinator for [Whole Foods Market](#).

Marilyn posed two questions to the panelists and each answered in order of their role in the supply chain.

“Describe your role in the supply chain”

Tom Parsons discussed his work at the University of Pennsylvania developing models of alternative livestock production. The swine facility at the New Bolton Center is the start of the pork supply chain. Pigs are raised at the Center for 8-10 weeks, or until they are 60 pounds, and are then sold to farms such as Sweet Stem Farms. Pigs selected for breeding and remaining at the Center begin reproducing at about six months in age. Each breeder has about two litters per year. The animals raised at the Center have access to bedding, the outdoors, and are not kept in gestation crates.

Phil Landis raises cattle, pigs and sheep on a 60-acre farm. Phil and his wife use a high touch approach to animal care, meaning that they are with the animals at least two times per day, providing individualized care to each animal. Pigs are raised in hoop buildings, allowing an area for them to root, as well as enough grazing land for the other animals. Labor on the farm is expensive and demanding. Phil spends up to 85 hours per week working on the farm. While most farms set their prices based on commodity prices, Sweet Stem Farm sets its prices based on cost. Phil hopes to double his output and sales in the next six of months.

Jay Smucker owns and operates a family-run, USDA inspected, small processing facility. His goal is to add value to what his customer's products in a manner that makes the meat production chain more sustainable. He believes small processing facilities are better equipped to meet the needs of small farms such as Sweet Stem Farm.

Jason Belleau manages the purchasing, sourcing, marketing, etc. of all species of meat for 39 Whole Foods stores on the East Coast. He acts as an ambassador between the farmers, stores, and customer base to develop and manage a regional and national meat program.

“Describe the challenges of your role in the supply chain”

Tom Parsons expressed a need to get more people thinking about what the market is and how local practices can be integrated into a larger scheme. Tom is currently only able to sell about 1/3 of the animals being produced, citing a lack of consumer demand for sustainably raised meat. He would like to challenge consumers to broaden their menus. Tom was also concerned about the growing global demand for meat. A recent United Nations projection forecasted that the demand for animal meat will outstrip what



the world can produce by 2050. Tom acknowledged a need to develop sustainable systems of meat production that are as efficient as industrial forms of food production.

Phil Landis discussed challenges related to high consumer demand for only certain cuts of meat, leaving the remaining part of the meat without a buyer. Whole carcass partnerships like the one Phil has with Whole Foods are necessary for production to be sustainable and economical. There are a limited number of farms involved in production like Sweet Stem Farm because it is difficult to sell these pigs at profitable prices and to find small USDA certified processors.

As a small processor, Jay found challenges in balancing being custom enough to meet the various needs of its customers and having an efficient process. He also struggled in finding the right balance between production and what he can sell. He also mentioned high labor costs and shortage of skilled labor as being challenges for his operation.

Jason expressed challenges in utilizing the whole carcass. At Whole Foods, less popular cuts of meat are put into sausage made in-house, but there is a limited market even for this product. Another challenge is the misconception amongst consumers that local meat should be cheaper. A third challenge is in obtaining a consistent flow of product.

Selected Questions & Answers

Ann and Marilyn moderated questions from the audience.

“How do we change the conversation from being about local v. national to industrial v. not?”

We have to move the story away from price and talk about value instead.

“Is the consumer, as the last stop on the value chain, the problem?”

There is a need for strategies to change consumer behavior. The Food Network has been a big help in educating consumers about less common cuts of meat. Jason has seen an increase in demand because of this. Chefs also need to be educated on how to keep the whole hog system going.

“How does Smucker’s Meats scale its operation so that prices are more competitive?”

Jay commented that his facility is still very small. There is a need to educate staff in becoming more efficient. If all players in the chain could become just a little bit more efficient, it would greatly help being competitive. Much of the skill in artisan butchery has been lost to factory line production in large plants.



“What are the impacts of regulation?”

Changes in labeling requirements are especially challenging for small processing plants. Some types of meat are harder to accurately label than others, especially ground beef. It seems that a lot of regulation is fear driven.

“Are costs of production accurately reflected in pricing?”

Most farmers don't understand their true cost of production. In research done by PASA, farmers do not value their time in cost calculations. Unprecedented corn prices have created a burden on farmers that can almost not be overcome. Phil cited a 120% increase in the price of feed over the last year. The increase in the cost of corn is directly related to policy requiring ethanol in fuel.

“How do we move to the next level?”

It is unclear how to move forward. Partly it is about educating people about the actual costs of production. Who are the business people that will bring this all together? How can we make it more affordable? Do we have enough farmers?