

# **Dorset local meat processing study**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A number of agencies within Dorset have come together to support the development of the local meat sector. This study is part of that work. It provides an impartial assessment of current facilities, an assessment of the need for a new cutting plant and an assessment of other issues that may limit growth or provide opportunities for the local meat sector in Dorset.

An estimated 70% of all known direct sellers in Dorset responded to a producer survey undertaken for this research. The survey showed that farmers sell approximately 5% of all beef and lamb slaughtered in the small and medium sized abattoirs in Dorset directly to the public. The results also suggested that if farmers could overcome processing and other related issues, they would wish to double the current number of animals being processed for direct sales.

The abattoirs most commonly used by direct sellers in Dorset are Sturminster Newton and C Snells. Half of the direct sellers (52%) use one of the co-located cutting plants (C&S Meats, C Snells and S J Norman & Sons). 38% of direct sellers have established their own facilities and 10% of farmers use services provided by a number of butchers who work closely with Sturminster Newton or C Snells.

Whilst the majority of direct sellers use one of the co-located cutting plants, the majority of carcasses for direct sales are processed in farmers' own facilities. For beef this is 80%, for lamb 72%.

The review of co-located cutting plants showed that the majority of users of the most commonly used facilities, C&S Meats and C Snells, rate the services satisfactory. It was not possible to give statistically valid results assessing S Norman & Sons cutting plant due to a low number of respondents using the facility.

The survey highlights a number of processing issues that some direct sellers face. These range from availability of slaughter, quality of butchery, packaging, cost of slaughter and cutting to traceability. Respondents also raised a number of issues associated with managing small-scale on-farm facilities.

Whilst the primary aim of this project was to better understand the processing issues affecting direct sellers, the producer survey was also used to explore other limiting factors for the growth of local meat sales in Dorset. Respondents ranked marketing issues higher than processing issues whilst distribution issues were rated as important as processing. Issues raised included lack of expertise and time, quality of farmers markets, planning issues and transport of small batches of animals.

The report concludes that there is no need for a stand alone new cutting plant. This is due to the strong existing alternative infrastructure (i.e. on-farm facilities, farm shops and butchers), the fact that the majority of users of the most commonly used main cutting plants have no quality or traceability concerns, there is further capacity at current facilities that users rate satisfactory and there is interest from more farmers in setting up or expanding existing on-farm facilities.

The report highlights a number of recommendations for addressing the processing, marketing and distribution challenges that direct sellers face in Dorset. These recommendations are supported by case studies.

The central recommendation from a concluding stakeholder meeting was to create a forum for developing the direct sales sector. This forum would provide an independent service to assist with trading links between producers, processors, distributors and buyers and it would offer guidance on regulations and sources of professional help. It would also help to establish sub-groups to develop modest-scale collaboration on production, processing, marketing and distribution. The forum would act as a local 'champion' for local food sales and help raise awareness of the reasons to buy local produce.

f3 the local food consultants, 2009

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