

## Local Abattoirs are Crucial for the Local Food Movement

For more information go to: <http://sustainontario.com/news> (sustainontario.com/initiatives/meatprocessing) or go to **the National Farmers Union Ontario office (1-888-832-9638 or [office@nfuontario.ca](mailto:office@nfuontario.ca))**

Since 1991, Ontario has lost 40% of its provincially inspected meat processing plants.

Small abattoirs across the province are struggling to survive for a variety of reasons. However, lack of demand for their services is not one of them - most small abattoirs and small meat processors say they are busier than ever.

Small, locally-owned, provincially-inspected, multi-species meat and poultry abattoirs are essential to the survival of family farms and rural communities. They provide a crucial link between livestock and poultry farmers and consumers looking for healthy, nutritious, delicious food produced by farmers they know and trust.

Since February 2010, more and more farmers, eaters and organizations have been working to save these rural businesses. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Hon. Carol Mitchell has acknowledged small abattoirs are a critical part of the local food movement and the local economy.

Some small abattoirs have received funding to make upgrades or expand their operations, but the minister also admits that funding alone will not solve all the issues. Small abattoirs and small poultry processors are still closing. Each time a small abattoir closes, farmers lose, the community loses and eaters lose.

One of the key issues is the impact that this will have on the rural economy and the ability to buy local products. More people today are aware of the importance of buying locally produced and processed meat either direct from farmers' or from butchers or retailers that purchase their meat from local farmers. More consumers are buying meat at a butcher shop, a supermarket, a health food store or a farmers' market because they want to know where their food is coming from and how it was raised. People are considering whether or not they are willing to pay more for local food, which is often fresher, and therefore healthier and tastier. The individual attention small farmers and abattoirs provide takes extra time and increase the value of local food.

The **Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario** are working to raise awareness about the issues of maintaining these local services in order to support the local rural economy and provide continued access to locally produced food. These are the issues they are raising:

- Despite increasing support for local food, small abattoirs are closing across Ontario.
- There cannot be local meat without small abattoirs and small poultry processors.

- Small abattoirs across the province are struggling to survive for a variety of reasons. However, lack of demand for their services is not one of them, nor is the decrease in the number of cattle in the province – most small abattoirs and small poultry processors are busier than ever.
- Abattoirs need to be able to stay small. Funding is often directed to abattoirs wanting to expand or develop new markets. Abattoirs who need to make upgrades, especially to aging facilities, must have access to user-friendly funds even if they do not want to expand their operation.
- Abattoir owners need to be able to see and plan for the future. There needs to be a long-term approach to regulatory compliance so that abattoir owners can develop realistic business plans which they can take to the bank.
- Safe food must always be a top priority. Effective regulations and government inspection programs protect family farms, eaters and food processors.
- Food safety regulations must accommodate processors of all sizes and must help maintain and expand the diversity of processors across the province.

Why the community must be aware of the potential loss of small abattoirs:

From an agricultural perspective

- How will this impact the farming community in Peterborough County?
- How many farmers will no longer be able to have access to a local abattoir?
- Do farmers in Peterborough County have access to small abattoirs now?
- Are there enough small abattoirs in Peterborough County or neighboring counties to meet the demand?

From an economic perspective

- Agriculture continues to be an important economic driver in our community – how will these changes reduce the amount of farm gate sales?
- Are farm gate sales decreasing because farmers do not have access to small abattoirs?
- What do small abattoirs contribute to our economy both as small businesses and in their role of supporting farmers, butcher shops, health food stores and other small businesses?

From the consumer's perspective

- What funding is available to local abattoirs to upgrade their facilities? How can small abattoirs get information on available funding?
- How can we continue to increase support to local food producers and get more people buying locally, if there is a reduction in processors?
- What can we do to help the small abattoirs in our community survive and thrive?

For more information about our InfoNotes contact

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