

Buying from a Local Meat Processor and Why it Matters

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Background

During the 1920's – 1980's, finding a local meat processor in the United States, commonly known as a meat butcher, was not hard to find. Back then, either the meat processor harvested (slaughtered) their own food animals and sold meat cuts out of their retail shop or hanging carcasses were shipped to them, as either halves or quartered, by rail car or refrigerated truck to be processed. As the large-scale meat packers began to expand, the introduction of boxed, vacuum packaged, subprimal cuts lead to the introduction of boxed meat. It was introduced in the later 1960's, but did not take off until the early 1980's. This extra step incorporated at the large-scale meat plant slowly began to reduce the existence of the local meat processor.

Today, grocery stores provide an array of meat cuts in various packages, flavors (preseason, marinated), precooked, etc., with full intent in providing a convenience to the customer by simply eliminating a step or two in the cooking preparation, which provides for a very wealthy country. With large-scale meat plants able to harvest thousands of food animals per day, the meat supply adds up throughout the year that sets the stage for grocery stores to provide all the products American consumers demand, plus some. However, in recent days, the United States is experiencing a pandemic that has significantly impacted our food, and meat industries. With the many unknowns of the corona virus, this has led meat companies to exhaust all possible intervention steps to tackle this virus and eliminate, or reduce, its spread. This pandemic has caused many meat plants to either slow down or stop their operations temporary, or permanently, which initially forced a small ripple extending to our grocery stores. A piece of the puzzle that needs to be highlighted are our livestock producers providing food animals to these meat plants. Many of our producers have been left, scratching their heads, feeling frustrated and scared, trying to figure out what to do with their animals. Some producers have turned to local meat processors to help alleviate some of these worries.



Meat processors serve as the middleman between the livestock producer and customer. Over the years, due to the expansion of large-scale packers, meat processors have stayed in the shadows, for those who remain in the business are only appreciated by those who acknowledge them. You may not realize, but your local meat processor provides many benefits compared to a grocery store, as the history, knowledge, art, and passion of the business are the driver to offering this service. Your local meat processor plays a critical role in not just supplying meat products to American consumers, but also helping our livestock producers and providing job opportunities.

Large supermarkets have been buying some processed products (ham, sausage, bacon, etc.) from your local processors to provide local products in their stores. Why not go directly to the source for these products?

Ohio and Meat Processors

With an estimated 3,585,000 livestock produced in Ohio, meat production remains a critical necessity. Currently, an estimated four hundred meat facilities exist in Ohio ranging from federal and state inspected to custom exempt. If there is something to learn from a pandemic, such as COVID-19, it the critical role meat processors play in the lives of the everyday producer and consumer. With ~ 75% of the beef market shares coming from four large-scale beef packing plants and ~ 60% of pork coming from three pork large-scale plants, the pros and cons quickly surface when a pandemic arrives unexpectedly. As customers begin to question, the time has come to start looking into buying from a local meat processor. Below is a list of reasons why you should buy your local:

1. Food comes directly from an Ohio producer
 2. Buying local helps our farmers/producers of Ohio
 3. Buying local helps the economy (business and industry)
 4. Help secure local jobs
 5. Have an opportunity to ask questions directly with employees – available customer service
 6. Food transparency: It's easy to trace the origin of the meat that you are buying.
 7. You can get to know the employees serving you
 8. Save money and still buy a quality product
 9. Less chance of them running out – for those offering a slaughter as a service
 10. May find regional or culturally unique cuts and processed products that you don't see in large supermarkets.
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Something to Know

These meat processors must be licensed under either the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service, Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) or your county health department to sell meat products. Currently, licensed with ODA Division of Meat Inspection, there are 178 fully inspected meat facilities and 86 custom only facilities. Most of the fully inspected facilities have a retail room where you can purchase fresh and processed products, such as sausage, bacon, etc. The custom exempt facilities are intended to only provide a slaughter service for customers who own an animal, and some may have a retail space.

A list of state meat processors can be found on ODA's website:

<https://agri.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/oda/divisions/meat-inspection/meat-district-coverage-map>

Sources:

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