Expansion of Small-Scale, Pasture-Based Poultry Businesses: Improving Feasibility and Access to Processing
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Introduction
Small specialty poultry producers raise free-range or organic poultry that boosts income on limited-resource farms and contributes to agricultural sustainability. Many would like to expand their operations but lack infrastructure and feasibility/feasibility planning tools. There is a need, in particular, for access to livestock processing. In response, Heifer International implemented a SARE-funded project that included a mobile poultry processing unit (MPU). The MPU, now owned by Kentucky State University, has allowed Kentucky producers to legally process poultry, and has been a gold standard across the country for MPU operation under government compliance. Partner organization, the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), assisted in developing farmer-friendly materials on small-scale poultry processing, entrepreneurship, nutrition, etc. Since the conclusion of the project, impacts continue on a national level and are summarized.

Kentucky MPU: Pioneer with Long-lasting Impact

History
• MPU built in 2000
• Began because small KY poultry producers had no way to process locally
• Started with a SARE grant
• Initially owned by Heifer International
• Insurance was problem because Heifer, Inc., had to ask farmer users to have a million dollars of insurance
• KSU took ownership of the unit in 2005
• Initial plan was to be used at many sites such as hangs
• However, site and docking station requirements presented barriers
• MPU is not allowed to be hooked to municipal system for wastewater
• Septic system is required; but H is difficult to find septic contractors to pump out waste water
• MPU had an owner that operated the unit to a side with a screened area under it for kill area (See Figure 1)
• Screaming not very stable in wind and insects could enter; an enclosed building was better at excluding insects/pests
• Hard to set up and take down
• MPU requires a high level of knowledge to use; coordinator needed to travel with it

Docking Station Equipment
• Level pad to pitch the unit; additional concrete pad sloped to drain for slaughter area
• Electrical requirements: 200 amp service panel that is either waterproof/covered and brake lights
• Water must be from an approved municipal source or a tested well; pressure must be above 10 gallons per minute
• Waste water treatment: 750-gallon grease trap and a 1500-gallon septic tank
• Electrical requirements: 200 amp service panel that is either waterproof/covered
• KSU has a waiver of liability
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• USDA inspects once per year and reviews HACCP paperwork
• KY Cabinet of Health Services is informed every time unit is used and they are present at many processing sessions, often training new staff
• USDA inspect once per year and reviews HACCP (expands)
• Farmers are advised to have a product liability policy in addition to their farm policy
• The meat can be sold anywhere in KY

Food Safety
• MPU operates under the following plans:
  • Standard Operating Procedures
  • Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures
  • Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points
  • Good Manufacturing Practices
  • Recall Plan
  • MPU Coordinator provides oversight, and assistance, if needed

Additional Objectives
In addition to the goal of developing an MPU to improve access to legal processing, this project developed farmer-friendly publications:
• Small Poultry Processing Plants and Services (now a self-published booklet)
• Legal Issues Impacting Small Poultry Processing (national level)
• Pastured Poultry Nutrition (being translated to Spanish)
• Guidelines for Pastured Poultry Production (accessed 15,000 times on Web in last 5 years)
• Small-Scale Poultry Processing (being translated to Spanish) (accessed 50,000 times on Web in last 5 years)
• Growing Your Range Poultry Business: An Entrepreneur's Toolbox (accessed 21,000 times on Web in last 5 years)

Materials from project are available at www.xtra.ncat.org and www.extension.poultry.rcaq.org

Materials have been updated since project ended in 2002

Further outcomes from the project included:
• A survey of needs of pastured poultry producers in 2000, a benchmark meeting of small poultry processors at Univ. of AR in April 2002 to network and develop budgets; a new law passed in MS that state law/s may not be more stringent than federal law regarding exemptions for poultry processing; and additional work in MS and AL continued to explore small scale poultry processing.

Conclusion
This project has improved the feasibility of small specialty poultry businesses. An innovative MPU has established relationships with the assistance of other organizations, which not only provided much needed access to poultry processing for small producers in KY, but also had been a pioneer in small-scale and MPU poultry processing and has provided information to individuals and groups across the country. Technical publications are developed on small-scale processing, business development, alternative genetics, and numbers in alternative production, as well as research notes on poultry meat regulations in each state and laws of small poultry processing services. In addition to the specific objectives outlined in a project, SARE grants can provide seed money and a launching pad for long-lasting projects and partnerships past the life of the grant, demonstrating how organizations with common goals can work together.

See the MPU at www.xtrasmallscalepoultry.rcaq.org Under Processing

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