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Feature Article

# Beef Producers Move to Control Their Destiny

By: Sandy Buxton, CAAHP

Cooperatives have been a part of the agricultural landscape for years as farmers sought ways to more economically purchase supplies or market their raw products. But few of us can say, "we were there" when one of these businesses were born.

That is not the case now for a group based in Washington County. On May 18<sup>th</sup>, a group of pasture-based beef producers culminated seven months of meetings, discussions, e-mails and projections, when the steering committee signed the paperwork to incorporate. This group of producers came together to form *Adirondack Grazers Cooperative* or Adk Grazers for short.

Now, even as you read this article, the group is only beginning to move grass-fed or pasture-raised, grain-finished meat through the marketing pipeline to an identified market area. This market area is the greater New York City metro area, which includes NJ, CT and Long Island for their purposes.

One of the points became obvious right from the beginning – there are a number of other small-scale producers who have been in production 5-10 years and are now facing similar issues. The big question, "How to grow their business using a marketing system that makes sense and allows them to work from their strengths?"



The group of beef producers listen to Jen Coleman from Brookefield Farm discuss an upcoming activity with the NYS Beef Producers Association. Getting together a group of producers to talk about the possibilities was important as the cooperative exploratory group began to formalize what and how it might operate.

As meetings progressed and Sarah did research in NYC's food world, the group started to get to work on developing the possibilities. A group formed to wrestle with marketing and distribution, what was needed, what would be helpful and they even applied for a couple of grants to try and help finance some of the work.

While the group did not receive either the grants, the

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work did help to solidify the vision and generate some semi-solid numbers for further discussion. Dan Stone from Stone Meadow Farm in Easton and Jodie Kubiak from Greenwich joined the Steering Committee along with Jen Coleman from Brookefield Farm. With more information from a person the *NY Times* called a "Rock star butcher" three years ago, Adam Tiberio of Tiberio Custom Meats, the group of producers began to envision something a little more ambitious than others before them.



Dan Stone of Stone Meadow Farm presents the business model to a group of beef producers at one of the meetings. Using power point presentations and printouts allowed new participants to be brought into the discussion at each meeting.

The whole project is still in its infancy but has been organized by a dedicated group of volunteers. A steering committee was formed and this group is dedicated to shepherd this new cooperative through the starting process. It has been a long journey from the first meeting, and the next twelve months will be fraught with perils and potential problems.

The cooperative is developing a system to move fresh meat from a USDA slaughter plant to NYC's high-end restaurants. The goal is the best possible return for the farmer by delivering a consistent, high-quality product.



Producers stood around and talked after each of the meetings as details continued to be hashed out. There was always plenty to talk about and details to explain.

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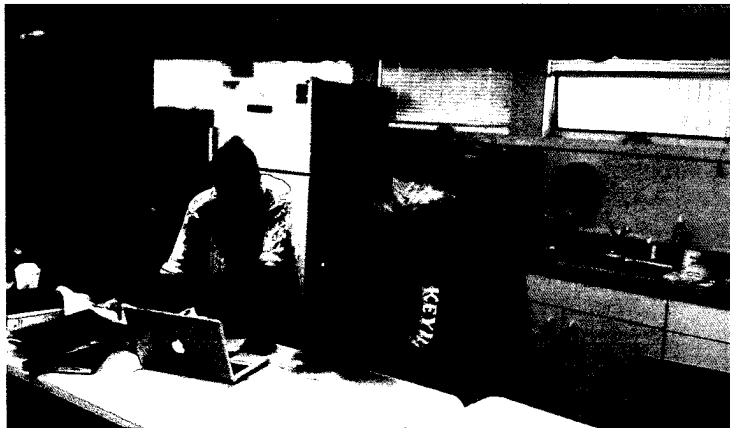
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The overhead of the cooperative will be funded by a 15% fee and cover a streamlined system of transportation, billing, collecting and marketing. Members have purchased a \$1000 share which entitles them to voting rights, dividends and marketing animals through the cooperative.



Meagan Blank from Rosie's Beef works to "extract" some inventory info about his herd from Dave Brown of Greenwich. One thing the cooperative discussion has demonstrated is the value for ALL size producers in knowing info about birth dates, breeding times and general age at marketing.



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At this time, the co-op will also market animals from non-members as long as they meet the required standards. As Dan Stone has frequently stated at the meetings, "It is all about inventory." The success of the cooperative is predicated on good quality animals providing high-quality meat. But there have to be enough animals to meet the basic demand and then potentially to grow with the group.

The key point is always price, and with the current auction beef market, some producers may view it as more of a moving target. The cooperative's goal is the best possible return to the farmer. At this time, the predicted price is \$3.50 to 3.80/pound on the rail, hoping this will return close to \$2.00/pound on the hoof.

One of the new board members of the cooperative Lisa Randles of White Clover Farm in Argyle. Lisa has reminded everyone of the challenge and time involved in achieving a high retail price for meat. "It takes time and connections to move product at the price you need to get, and then, you may be out of meat until it is time to slaughter another animal, months away."

The hope and plan of the cooperative is to be able to have enough animals in the pipeline to meet the projection of processing 2 animals/week with an eye on growing the number. The market is available and the farmers will have some price power as a group.

Profitable, sustainable and successful are three words, the cooperative board is hoping will describe the group five years from now. With the planning and business focus they have maintained throughout the process so far, it is likely they will achieve them. If you would like more information on the Adirondack Grazers Cooperative, please visit [www.adkgrazers.com](http://www.adkgrazers.com). The materials for potential producers are under the producer tab. There will be several meetings scheduled for Albany and Columbia Counties as the cooperative continues to recruit members. Feel free to call Sandy at 518-380 1498 or Steve 518-380-1497 for more information.

### Ration Article

## LOW STARCH DIETS: THE U.S. SITUATION

Dr. Gant, Miner Institute President

Submitted by Richard Smith, Saratoga County

We all know that dairy cows and the rumen microbes do not have an actual starch requirement. Rather, the rumen microbes require adequate fermentable carbohydrates (starch, sugars, soluble fiber, and digestible NDF) to provide energy for microbial protein synthesis. Until recently, corn grain was fairly cheap and so there was little incentive in the U.S. to formulate diets lower in starch and higher in alternative fermentable carbohydrates. However, research conducted during the past five years at Miner Institute and elsewhere has shown that lactational performance is similar for high-producing, mid-lactation cows fed TMR with starch contents ranging from 18 to 25% of dietary DM. Additional research has documented that low starch diets can be successfully fed to dry cows, fresh cows, and early lactation cows without compromising any aspect of performance compared