



BC Beef Packing Plant: an update by Susan Evans

One of the questions that comes up at the beef packing plant engagement sessions is “why do we need a federally inspected plant in BC now?” And while there are many reasons, the most important reason may be that, in order for the industry to grow, the BC beef industry needs to be able to label, market and sell the beef grown in the province as BC Beef.

The consumer landscape is changing. Consumers want to know where the food they eat—whether they buy it at the grocery store or order it in a restaurant—comes from. Over the past several years we have seen a tremendous expansion in marketing locally grown everything—from fresh vegetables and fruit to dairy, chicken and pork—advertised across all consumer channels.

This isn't a surprise to the beef industry. Consumer research done in BC showed strong consumer preference and willingness to pay more beef that was grown in BC—many BC grocery retailers and foodservice operators want to satisfy this demand and offer their customers beef identified from BC but are unable to find enough supply.

“We know of at least one major retail chain in the province who wanted to launch a BC Beef program but had to change their plans because they weren't able to procure a secure supply of product,” says Kevin Boon, General Manager, BC Cattlemen's Association. “This is a missed opportunity for the industry; we are growing BC Beef—we should be able to sell it as BC Beef.”

Over a number of years, the idea for a federally inspected beef packing plant that could take advantage of this consumer need has been carefully researched and explored. The BC Plant Project Team continues to make presentations to beef producers and interested industry members to see if there is a willingness to take this plan to the next level.

Over the past two months, the team has presented at meetings in Vanderhoof, Kamloops, 100 Mile House, Cache Creek, Vernon and Merritt. Many of the beef producers attending these meetings have expressed their interest in participating in the development of a beef packing plant in BC and have shared the number of cattle they would have available for processing.

It was noted at these meetings that some producers want to make an investment but don't have the ability to be the final producer before the plant. The project team is looking at ways to create partnerships and investments that provide the opportunity for all stages of the supply chain to be

involved. From cow/calf operators and dairy producers, grain growers, backgrounders and feedlot operators, all can participate.

“One the questions that comes up at these meetings is ‘how will this be different from other packing plants?’ the key difference is a fully integrated supply chain,” says Boon. “This approach unifies the industry in a production chain in the way it hasn’t done before—everyone will have a stake in its success.”

Producers have an opportunity to participate in this process and shape a plan that addresses their needs. This is an opportunity to better align the supply chain to meet the needs of BC consumers and customers to improve the long-term profitability and sustainability of the cattle industry in BC.

We invite you to attend one of Producer Engagement sessions for more information and to sign up for regular updates at the BC Packing Plant website: www.bcbeefpackingplant.ca