



Background

In 2004, new Provincial Meat Inspection regulations necessitated that all purchasable meat be processed at a licensed facility, and, as per the 2011 Alberni Valley Agricultural Plan, the local livestock industry is in decline. The licensed facilities on Vancouver Island all require significant travel distances, and producers express concern about stress to animals and resultant reduction in meat quality .

In 2014, a local abattoir was one of two top needs indicated by regional farmers. Recently, a livestock survey indicated that a legal local alternative would increase 67% of producer's production. A feasibility study for a local abattoir facility was completed by Murray Coates in Spring, 2016.

Event Overview and Context

The Town Hall Forum was an Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) initiative, with the intent of sharing results of the feasibility study with local producers. In addition, the forum aimed to; a) confirm buy-in from the community for an abattoir project; b) begin to document available resources within the community; and c) identify the desired model for ownership/management. The results of the Town Hall were to determine whether and how the ACRD and community move forward towards design and construction of a facility and slaughter support for producers.

A total of 45 people attended the event, including a delegation from the Coombs and District A Farmers' Institutes.

This document provides a summary of the event and a record of discussions that took place. Any commentary not included is strictly an oversight in the documentation process and does not at all reflect on the relevance of such commentary. *Feedback and additional notes are welcome to be shared with the ACRD. Contact info and a summary of next steps can be found on page 8.*

Speakers/Facilitators

Kathleen Gibson, Facilitator/Presenter

Kathleen Gibson has been working on public policy for sustainable food systems for over 30 years. These efforts include reform of supply management and support for development of food policy councils, as well as seven years on abattoir licensing.

Most recently, in 2013-14 through the BC Food Systems Network Kathleen helped lead a province-wide campaign to retain the integrity of BC's Agricultural Land Reserve.

Between 2005 and 2012, Kathleen first supported and then led the Meat Industry Enhancement Strategy and the Meat Transition Assistance Program, which assisted meat processors around BC to become licensed under the province's 2004 Meat Inspection Regulation. As well as assisting operators with Class A and B provincial licenses, Kathleen and her team, with the Ministry of Health, developed Class D and E licenses for on-farm slaughter in rural and remote regions. At the time they were developed, these classes of license were unique in the developed world. Before leaving "the meat file," Kathleen spent a year working with the Ministry of Health on the terms of reference for a provincially managed inspection system, which was put in place after the Canadian Food Inspection Agency ceased inspection of BC's provincially licensed slaughter facilities in 2012.

Kathleen is trained in communications and conflict resolution. For a number of years she wrote an op-ed column for Country Life in BC, the province's farm newspaper. She is a founding member and has served on the Boards of the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable in Victoria; the BC Food Systems Network; and Food Secure Canada.

Murray Coates, Presenter

Murray Coates, of Janco Associates Business Consulting, has experience in the processing and manufacturing industries, including meat processing, and was highly involved in the development of the Salt Spring Island Community Abattoir. He is the author of the 2016 Alberni Abattoir Feasibility Study.

Summary of Class A Abattoir Requirements, Presented by Murray Coates

- Feasibility Study was based on Class A facility (slaughter and cut/wrap). Study included regulatory requirements, market analysis, preliminary design and capital costs, waste disposal options, financial assessment, benefits of a facility.
- Livestock industry is prominent in region but is constrained by lack of local processing ability.
- According to Stats Canada, less than 10% of local meat consumption is produced here, and there is significant market potential and a strong local food movement.
- 67% of producers surveyed would expand their herd if there was a local abattoir.
- Solid and liquid waste disposal is a big issue. Liquid waste can not go into normal sewer system. Specified Risk Materials (SRM) would need special consideration and planning. Cedar has a rendering plant but reported they would not likely pick-up in Port Alberni due to low volume. A composting facility could be attached to

- the abattoir, and the Earth, Land, and Sea composting facility would consider processing the solid waste.
- The Class A facility, as described in the study, was sized to accommodate 200 animals with an expansion capacity of up to 300 animals per year.
 - Funding a facility could be challenging. Grant opportunities would likely require significant equity, and the facility would need to be organized as a non-profit.
 - Cost estimate of a facility is estimated to be \$550,000, including \$100,000 for land.
 - Revenue could be approximately \$140,000 annually based on 2016 projections. A facility could break even in year two, not including repayment of initial capital cost.
 - Facility benefits would include a reduction in costs for farmers, improved meat quality, increased regional production of livestock, reduced dependency on imported food, job creation, and improved access to local food.

Audience Commentary and Feedback

- Cautionary tale brought forward about 100 Mile House abattoir project. It collapsed after cost doubled due to regulations changing during project development. Kathleen noted that the inspection system is now under the Ministry of Agriculture rather than a health agency, as it was at the time.
- Anger expressed at government regulations and control of industry.
- Commodity markets will include lean years and the community must be prepared. This is a hindrance but an abattoir should still be built.
- Producers note concern that a Class A operators may not process meat to their liking, and that in that case they would not use their facility - “they only get one chance to do it right”.
- The challenge of finding an operator for a Class A facility was noted.
- Producers express dissatisfaction with status quo - have to wait four months for slaughter date and still can’t get the animals they want in at once.
- Producers note stress to animals during transport and overnight stay at Class A facility. One producer describes on-farm kill as the animal being led by a farmer it knows from the field to the point of death very quickly and with little to no stress; the farmers control the one second between life and death, rather than it being a drawn out process.
- One producer notes increased sales capacity of \$300 per animal when able to access parts (tripe etc) that they can’t access when bringing animal to a facility.
- Question as to whether current facilities have any intentions of expanding capacity - Murray suggests that it is not likely.

- Note that no funding, such as the MTAP, is currently available for abattoir development as it was when regulations were announced. Cost overruns for similar projects are common.

Options for Moving Forward, Kathleen Gibson

Following the Q&A with regards to a Class A facility, Kathleen Gibson presented an overview of the current licensing regulations as follows:

1. Class A - Slaughter and cut/wrap. Each carcass is inspected and can be sold throughout the Province of BC
2. Class B - Same as Class A except without cut/wrap services
3. Class D - On-farm slaughter of own and other's animals. Up to 25 beef-sized animals per year. Must complete Slaughter Safe course and feasibility study and have approved food safety plan. Currently only allowed in certain designated areas which are classed as 'remote'. Meat is only allowed to be sold within the Regional District where it was produced (restaurants and retail OK).
4. Class E - On-farm slaughter of own animals only. Up to 10 animals per year. Must complete Slaughter Safe course and feasibility study and have approved food safety plan. Only allowed in certain designated areas which are classed as 'remote'. Meat is only allowed to be sold within the Regional District where it was produced (direct to consumer only).

Kathleen notes serious difficulties with pursuing Class D/E licenses for region. They were developed for very remote regions such as Bella Coola, Queen Charlotte Islands, and Powell River. She notes that with Class A licenses a revenue stream is available through cut/wrap which is absent in Class B.

Kathleen notes 4 possible options available to producers:

1. Do nothing
2. Press for Class D/E option
3. Build or retrofit for a Class A or B
4. Build a mobile Class B with a set of docking stations.

Audience Comments and Feedback

- District A Farmers' Institute has been bringing requests for amendments to Class D/E licenses to the Provincial Government for the past three years. Cites government representatives as saying that the Farmers' Institute model is the one which will grow the farming business.
- One producer indicates that it routinely takes them over two hours of documented travel time to get to the nearest facility.
- Class D/E doesn't require a building. Inspector walks through site and works with producer to develop a food and safety plan.

- Suggestion that Class D licenses would facilitate more skills training opportunities in the community, whereas a Class A facility would concentrate those skills in one person.
- The last thing a government wants preceding an election is a ‘noisy issue’.
- Creston is an area with an example of a farmer that built a class B facility, then worked in tandem with two local cut/wrap facilities.
- General acknowledgement that changing government regulations could be very difficult and time consuming.

Break and Re-evaluation

Kathleen spoke to sensing that pursuing a Class A/B abattoir is not a big driver in the Alberni Community, and felt a need to restructure the forum to further discuss alternatives. She noted that Class D/E licenses were designed to deal with remote areas, but perhaps could be expanded to address the lack of capacity existing with the two nearby abattoirs. Class D/E licenses were developed in 2010 but have not been reassessed since.

Audience Comments and Feedback

- A producer noted that they don’t want to do on-farm slaughter on their small operation, noting lack of skill/knowledge, concerns about waste disposal, and desire for cut and wrap services.
- Concern about government ‘moving goalposts’, as in the example of the 100 Mile House project. Question about whether licenses are indefinite or can be revoked - response is that Class A/B facilities can lose license anytime, as they are inspected, and that Class D/E have a 5 year term where they must follow their safety plan and procedures.
- Producer noted that with 4 Class D licenses in the Valley, the community could process 100 beef per year.
- Producers noted that transport is an issue in getting from a Class D slaughter facility to cooler for hanging then cut/wrap services.
- Note that thousands of animals are slaughtered in the bush by hunters, with no evidence of illnesses reported.
- A cut and wrap provider indicated that kills on-farm are not a problem.
- Suggestion that fear of regulatory requirements makes people go underground.
- Note that when slaughter is on-farm with a facility for hanging and cut/wrap, a producer is able to control all aspects of the end of life process, right through to final sale. This puts income back into the hands of the farmer, instead of them having to pay others to do ‘their job’. Allowing Class D licenses would enable government to put framework around something that is already happening under the table.

Outline of Community Assets

Kathleen discussed the importance of analyzing community assets such as:

1. Social Capital: Producer support, trained slaughter personnel, local food, mechanism for communication, local government support (strong support for producers evident in Alberni Valley)
2. Financial Capital: Existing facilities, other possible sites
3. Natural Capital: Terroir (concept of food coming from a specific geographical/cultural place), unique branding

Murray discussed requirements of a mobile abattoir. They need to provide all the amenities of a fixed plant. Technically the Salt Spring facility is a mobile, but practically, it is only moveable. Mobile must still have a corral, docking station, waste management services.

Audience Comments and Feedback

- A mobile facility tried for four years to become licensed, then gave up in frustration.
- Mobile units have the issue of hanging; kill onsite, but then where does meat hang for two weeks prior to cut/wrap. Need identified for more cut/wrap and cooler facilities in region.
- Producer spoke of desire for community to come together - killing at farm of choice, then pick up by proper vehicle for delivery to cooler and cut/wrap facility.
- A community member with experience in working with government to obtain community forest license indicated willingness to work with a group towards amendment of regulations for the region.
- Note that other communities have similar desire to amend Class D/E licenses, and that an election is pending.
- Producer suggests that while a Class A facility would be ideal, it does not appear feasible at this time.
- Discussion around ability to sell Class D meat to restaurants - Class D can be sold to restaurant/retail within regional district, Class E can only be sold directly from farmer to consumer.
- Question as to whether the ACRD would support producers if they wanted to lobby for changes to regulations. ACRD representative indicates that they would strive to support and work with producers. Suggest the Agricultural Development Committee could suggest that the Board of Directors send a letter of support and lobby for the desired changes on behalf of constituents. Feels that a Class A would be ideal, but that Class D/E could relieve stress in interim.

- Suggestion to form list of residents and producers who would like to be part of a working group on the initiative, with a goal of allowing Class D/E in region.
- Concern that granting Class D/E licenses then taking them away if a Class A facility was built could be re-traumatizing.
- Question - All slaughter used to happen on-farm. What was wrong with that?

Flip Charts

Three flip charts were posted with the aim of collecting data and feedback from participants. Participation in this exercise was minimal; most attendees continued with discussion rather than writing on the flip charts. Flip chart notes posted as follow:

What's Here?

- Slaughter expertise in the community
- Access to markets on the West Coast
- Workforce that is seeking employment (seasonal workers who may need to fill off season)
- Cold storage potential at the old fish plant
- Slaughter facility at the old Krauss farm
- There is a front end loader on every farm and we all have machinery to bury everything

What's Missing

- Time
- Community consensus
- Processing capacity is missing despite proximity to Class A facility (proximity does not guarantee reasonable and/or timely access)
- Value added processing (i.e.. Sausage making, bone broth)
- If there is such a long waiting period for beef to be slaughtered at a regulated facility, could this not be an argument for a D or E license in Port Alberni?
- D and E license for current producers which could be temporary until an A plant built, as this would be better for animal welfare

What Information Do We Need?

- D/E review
- Criteria for D/E food safety plan
- Get rid of government involvement
- Regional district to coordinate community to get or administer Class D or E licenses

Summary of Next Steps and Conclusion

Facilitators presented the following suggestions for next steps, as indicated in and suggested by the discussion amongst participants:

- Get a clear definition of what a D/E license is - how many are there in the Province, what do the safety and procedure plans look like, how much do they cost to establish?
- Research potential for opportunities for collaboration and Class D operators within the region.
- Investigate options for mobile cut and wrap and cooler facilities
- Create a D/E working group
- Visit Powell River to see existing Class D facilities
- Offer a Slaughter Safe training course in the Valley

For more info or to submit feedback, please contact any of the following:

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