

PROPOSED USDA MEAT PROCESSING FACILITY IN THE CENTRAL SIERRA

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INTRODUCTION & METHOD



Some California livestock producers are interested in selling meat from the livestock that they produce from California rangelands to local restaurants, butcher shops and the local communities where they live. However, **access to a USDA Meat Processing Facility is limited and challenging in the Sierra Nevada (Figure 1). Since COVID, we learned that our American Meat Supply Chain has some significant limitations as illustrated by a meat supply shortage that occurred.** Production lines were slowed, which caused less meat to be processed each production day, and as much as a 45% decrease was reported³. There was an increased demand for meat, but with the slower rate of production, prices rose. Some supermarkets had to put limitations on the number of packages of meat a consumer could buy³. As a consequence, the United States Department of Agriculture is now providing significant financial incentives for renovation, expansion or creation of Meat Processing Facilities through grants.

This project, "Proposed USDA Meat Processing Facility in the Central Sierra" was initiated by two county supervisors. Then, a group of stakeholders composed of local ranchers, Ag Commissioners, County Supervisors, County Farm Bureau members, local Cattlemens Associations, and the local UCCE Livestock Advisor met and created a survey to distribute to livestock producers. The objective of this survey was to understand the needs of the Central Sierra livestock producers (focus on cattle, sheep, goats and pigs). If the results show that there is enough volume to justify moving forward, the size and scope will need to be decided. Another survey will be released, and public meetings held to decide the next steps.

A Qualtrics survey with 14 questions was sent to livestock producers from the Central Sierra (Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, and Tuolumne Counties) via email, social media, newsletter, personal communication. The survey was opened in August 2023, and re-opened in October-November 2023.

	Number of people reached	Number of clicks
UCCE Central Sierra Newsletter	August 3rd : 2,130 people reached November 3rd : 2,146 people reached	August 3rd : 6 people clicked on the link November 3rd : 2 people clicked on the link TOTAL of clicks = 8
Personal email	July 31st : 438 people reached August 25th : 439 people reached October 20th : 435 people reached November 6th : 435 people reached	July 31st : 206 people opened the email, and 34 people clicked on it August 25th : 159 people opened the email, and 8 people clicked on the link October 20th : 158 people opened the email, and 3 people clicked on it November 6th : 171 people opened the email, and 5 people clicked on the link TOTAL of clicks = 50
Facebook	July 31st : 8,487 people reached August 25th : 280 people reached October 19th : 923 people reached	July 31st : 12 people reacted, 78 people shared, and 100 people clicked on the link August 25th : 2 people reacted, 4 people shared, and 0 people clicked on the link October 19th : 6 people reacted, 13 people shared, and 7 people clicked on the link TOTAL of clicks = 107

RESULTS

164 livestock producers answered the survey (42 surveys incomplete, so we are presenting 122 results) from 12 different counties (Figure 1).

- 73%** of the respondents think that having a USDA Meat Processing Facility in the Central Sierra is a **high and essential priority**.
- 99%** of the respondents are **somewhat or extremely likely to use this facility**.
 - **48%** of the respondents will look at **price point**.
 - **77%** of the respondents will look at **location**.
 - **74%** of the respondents will look at **availability**.

At the time of this survey, livestock producers are interested in processing 1,943 beef, 903 goats, 999 sheep, and 2,098 pigs per year (Figures 2 & 3, Table 1). The average per month is represented by the red lines.

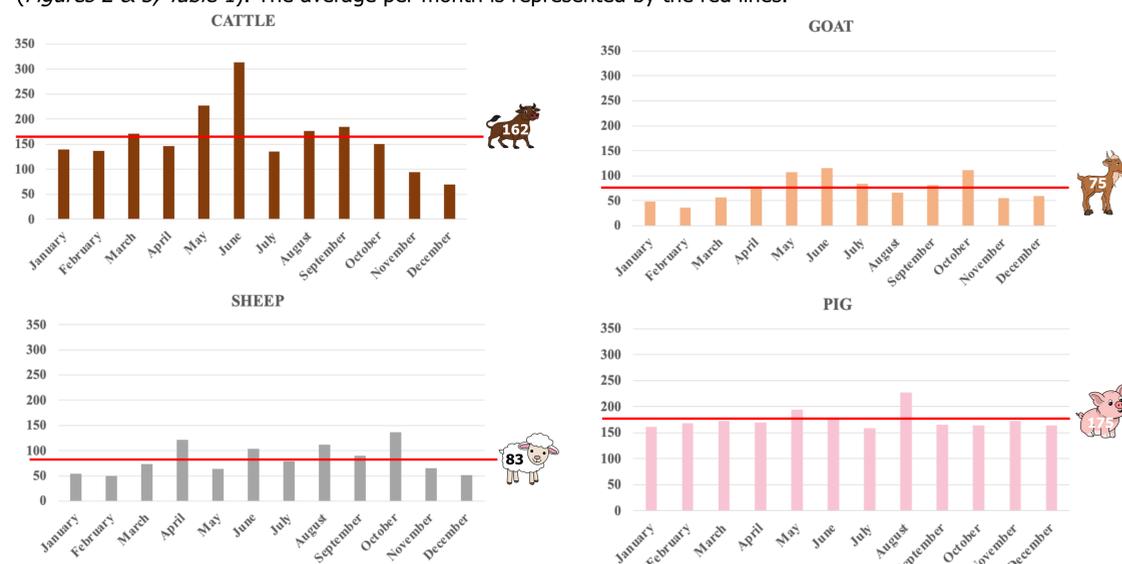


Figure 2: Number of animals processed per month for each species and monthly average overall

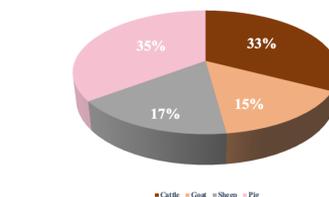


Figure 3: Percentage of each species per year

Table 1: Number of large producers vs small producers for each species

	Small Producer (<25 animals)	Large Producer (>25 animals)
Cattle	73	26
Goat	17	6
Sheep	23	10
Pig	43	10

Some ranchers raise multiple species.

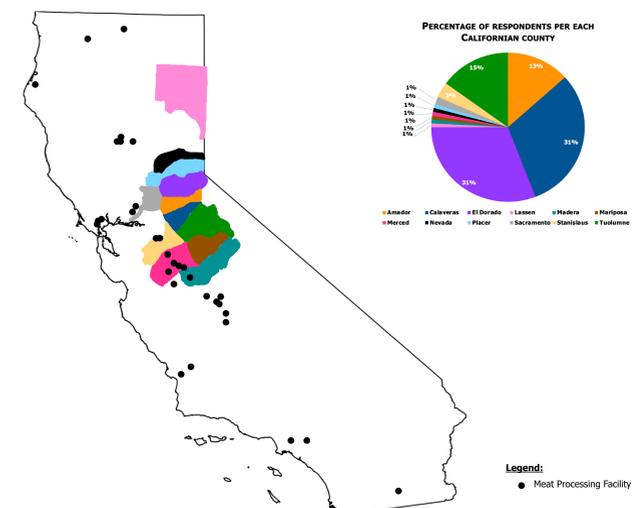


Figure 1: County of origin of the livestock producers who answered the survey & localization of meat processing facilities in California

Source: Qualtrics survey results and <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/inspection/establishments/meat-poultry-and-egg-product-inspection-directory>

- 71%** of the respondents are **interested in short term freezer storage** (less than 1 week).
- 25%** of the respondents are **interested in long term freezer storage** (from 2 weeks to 6 months).
- 4%** of the respondents did not specify if they are **interested in short or long term freezer storage**.

- 5%** of the respondents are **interested in halal certification** (goat & sheep).
- 7%** of the respondents are **interested in kosher certification** (goat & sheep).
- 25%** of the respondents are **interested in halal and kosher certifications**.
- 62%** of the respondents are **not interested in halal or/and kosher certifications**.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

These survey results show that there is **high interest** for a USDA Meat Processing Facility in the Central Sierra, and beyond. Some livestock producers expressed that "The lack of local processing availability is keeping us from going deep into direct marketing" and "I believe it will greatly help local producers and consumers". Also, several livestock producers commented that they will be interested in raising other species if this project happens. Right now, in addition to the distance, wait time at USDA facilities is also a challenge for California livestock producers. **The volume of this facility would be the equivalent of a small meat processing facility.** Number of animals processed will probably evolve in the future because of uncertainty and changes.

To this date, survey results were presented during two meetings. Future steps for this project are to decide the type of processing facility, size, location, and ownership. **The first step will be to conduct a feasibility study and business plan.** A grant proposal was already submitted to cover these expenses. **To be continued...**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank all of the livestock producers who participated in the survey. We also want to thank the group of core stakeholders who helped create the survey. Thank you as well to each person who attended the two meetings where we presented the survey results, and talked about the next steps moving forward. Finally, thank you to Robin Martin for providing the number of people reached by the different means of distribution.

³Whitehead D, Brad Kim YH. The Impact of COVID 19 on the Meat Supply Chain in the USA: A Review. Food Sci Anim Resour. 2022 Sep;42(5):762-774. doi: 10.5851/kosfa.2022.e39. Epub 2022 Sep 1. PMID: 36133635; PMCID: PMC9478983.