

State and Provincially inspected meats, equal in all ways but one...

The issues facing Canadian farmers and US farmers always seem so different until we talk to each other, and that is exactly what happened in the workshop on state and provincial meat inspections laws and limitations.

In the US a many many year effort to allow the interstate sale of state inspected meat was thought to be won with the provision in the last Farm bill requiring USDA to develop rules allowing such sales. After a three year rule making process, the 'success' is that 3 out of 27 states have indicated an interest in the program, and within those states only a limited number of processors will either qualify or afford to participate. Most states, farmers and state legislators have been left holding a bag of promises from Congress that were turned into dust by USDA rules.

In Canada, provinces inspect meat available for sale in their own province but cannot sell to others. A national / provincial commission has developed a pilot project to determine the feasibility of expanding trade between provinces. In one case a city that straddles the provincial border – meat can be sold only on the appropriate provincial side of the city.

To implement the pilot project 13 processors have been identified and some of the requirements that are not food safety related have been relaxed or repealed for these participants. For ex-

- the paving requirement has been changed to a no dust requirement
- the federal requirement for separate shower and washroom has been modified
- The prohibition of an attached retail facility was waived

Next year or so trade between provinces should begin

The case for the US seems a bit more dour. USDA in developing the rules has determined that any state that is interested in being involved in interstate sale must not only be equal to the USDA standards but "the same as" . Why is that such a big difference? The same as standard goes far beyond food safety to issues like the same computer as USDA; the same training as USDA; the same monitoring as USDA.etc etc etc...

Out of 1800-1900 state inspected meat processing plants, maybe 25 will participate. Many legislators do not believe that this limited level of access to interstate sales was neither what Congress intended or totally based on food safety needs.

As Rep. Sue Wallis noted, "There is not one USDA plant in my state; we have waited way too long for this and we have been stymied every step of the way." she continued." We have state inspected facilities that are creating safe products and we should not have to spend money on new computers to allow meat to be sold to our neighbors."

Several members are discussing going to Congress to request new language and a review of the rules.

As with any good discussion new ideas came up including question from NH about why, if they are not looking for USDA funds, can't they establish their own process to inspect meat to be sold only within their state?

Stay tuned.....