

# Meat Science Extension — Meat Industry Relationships

Stephen F. Krut\*

It is a very distinct and personal honor for me to be asked to participate in this 35th Annual Reciprocal Meat Conference. I am, however, somewhat embarrassed to be placed in a position of giving advice to those who are widely regarded as being some of the most crucial, most progressive, most visionary, most important . . . and very often . . . the most performance proven individuals within the entire agricultural community, let alone the meat industry. And, let me assure you of one thing, those credentials you have in the eyes of the meat industry aren't just hype . . . they were earned!

When Tom Carr wrote last year asking if I might address the question of Meat Industry — Meat Science Extension Relationships, he suggested a few very important areas of concern that we might discuss.

So let's begin with a thumbnail sketch of just what constitutes the meat industry and which segment we're speaking about today. As you are certainly aware, the meat industry is composed of nearly 16,000 plants. Of that total, perhaps 1,000 could be regarded as big plants. We think of them as the national packers and processors, even though many only operate in certain regions of the country.

Everybody else is in what both the industry and the public regards as the small plant sector. It is a sector that represents perhaps 90-95 percent of the total number of plants, but is responsible for between 5-10 percent of the total packing and processing manufacturing. This small plant sector is dominated by family and independently owned and operated businesses. The preponderance of these firms is in small rural areas.

They have one other common denominator that's noteworthy: no two are alike!

The American Association of Meat Processors has 1500 small member firms. And, in working with 28 affiliated state packer and processor associations representing more than 2,000 plants, we find that their operations are all over the board. They may slaughter for farmers and ranchers, or for commercial trade. They may process meats on a custom or retail basis. Some are wholesalers, some have a simple meat case for consumer sales. Others have full-fledged supermarkets. Many are wholesalers while others serve the hotel-

restaurant-institution trade. Some operate home food service businesses, while others feature frozen food locker storage. Some produce a single product, such as country ham or dried beef, while others with a mere handful of employees manufacture 50 or 100 different sausages and loaves. Some sell sides of beef and typically handle pork as well. This product mix is also important to remember. In fact, a 1982 survey of our own membership drew 744 responses and showed that 97 percent of the firms were handling beef, 96 percent pork, 38 percent veal, 57 percent lamb, 36 percent poultry and 81 percent cured meats. About 70 percent of the small plants responding still slaughter. They typically have 10 employees or less and about 77 percent of the plants are under state or federal meat inspection. I'll be happy to provide a copy of that plant profile to those who would like one.

With that in mind, our assessment is really quite simple: you've simply been asked to be all things to everyone in the meat industry and you've thus far done one genuinely remarkable job!

You and your colleagues have been problem solvers for individual plant operators. You've been called at 6 a.m. and at 10 p.m. You've been called out on weekends and during your vacation times to solve that "urgent" problem. You've not only judged their individual meat products on a competition basis, but suggested to them how the process could be improved to generate even more sales.

Custom or farm, slaughter or processing, plant operators have all found one bleak reality: it is impossible to hire and keep good people, to pay for plant improvements, and to purchase expensive equipment when the business has ups and downs and must respond to changes in the volatile farm economy. Severely burned by drastic past swings in beef production, these small plant operators have diversified. They now handle beef and pork, and poultry and seafood. The chicken frank that some may once have thought of as a cheap imitation of the venerable hot dog is being consumed in record numbers. Small meat processors are now making not only beef and pork franks, but chicken, turkey and cheese products as well.

Diversity has been the hallmark of the successful plant. It faces the fact that it is in the meat and food business and is no longer solely dependent on a single commodity. This allows it to respond to not only agricultural market realities, but to foreign and political changes as well. Changes in prices for hides or offal, embargos, grading changes, newly increased or newly decreased competition in given areas, new ethnic groups and population shifts all involve new feeding, marketing and merchandising opportunities.

---

\*S. F. Krut, Executive Director, American Association of Meat Processors, P.O. Box 269, Elizabethtown, PA 17022

*Reciprocal Meat Conference Proceedings, Volume 35, 1982.*

For the future, it will be important for the small processor to not only use a variety of meat commodities, but to also be able to use them in different fashions.

The new technologies that you have developed, in flaking and forming, in sausage production, in blending textured vegetable protein, massaging, stimulation, and the new equipment development allows greater variety and specialization to take place in the same product or commodity line.

It becomes imperative for you to not only be in the field demonstrating those proven technologies so that they are used, but also to be walking the ground of the small plant sector in search of new applications, technology needs and refinements. If necessity is the mother of invention, then the small plants in the meat industry truly constitute a mother lode of opportunity for the meat science specialist. And surely you must realize the potential for new products and production capabilities for those 15,000 plants that are operating on only 5 percent of the total national meats output.

Thus today's meat scientist and specialist, if he is to successfully respond to the small meat processor's needs, must not only follow those changes, but be a scout, a forecaster, and a visionary out in front to signal change in needs and in market opportunities.

In the past, you and your associates have worked with national and state meat industry associations. Some of them you actually founded. And others you've taken under your wing to lend your advice, guidance, facilities and time. You have one tremendous constituency within the small plant sector of the meat industry. Some of our foremost small processors . . . those that have been the most successful . . . directly attribute the fullest measure of that success to those of you who put them on the right track in product development, improvement and merchandising. For some, you actually helped design their plants. And, in virtually every case, it has been a task you accomplished as a labor of love.

There is another tremendously important role for the meat scientist and extension specialist. It is a role that could not be filled by anyone else. On critical issues, whether they be nitrites, food safety, additives, net weight labeling, or even animal welfare, the public eye readily understands two major points of view. The first is what the media professionals like to call the "public interest" position. The other is the meat industry "side." Media thrives on controversy and it has become increasingly popular for lawmakers, at the national, state, county and even local levels, to take one of the sides. These sides appear to them as black and white, clear-cut differences.

This means that a third party, a neutral entity that doesn't see profit growth or decline based upon its position on an issue, is often needed to put things in a proper perspective. The nitrite issue was a prime example of the tremendous value that a third party holds for the future of food safety. What other quarter had the expertise, the research, the documentation and the common sense to help stop and redirect this tremendously misguided bureaucratic crusade? We think there was none.

When New York State legislators drafted a bulk meat sales rule last year, it never occurred to them to ask industry what it thought, because to their way of thinking, industry was not to be trusted nor consulted. Industry was the entity that "needed" to be regulated. When the A.A.M.P. suggested that meat specialists, university extension personnel and others should

have at least been consulted, the legislators ignored the request. When comments from your associates did come in, the bureaucrats and their lawmaker friends ignored them, even going to the extreme of hiding them from the governor! In public meetings, the credentials of those meat specialists were challenged. But I want to assure you of one thing, that such criticism backfired on those who mouthed it. Many of you in this room and your colleagues overwhelmed the folks in Albany with their letters in support of those whose comments were challenged.

In 50 states, the number of good red meats specialists is dwindling in proportion to need. Payrolls are being cut and the situation is getting difficult. In at least one state, government officials didn't have a single red meats expert in their employ and didn't know where to turn for help. Their solution to the problem of combating illegal meat merchandising techniques was to ignore it. They didn't know who could help them.

As you know, having worked with the meat industry manufacturing and processing segment, things have changed and continue to change. One thing hasn't changed and that's the ongoing, continuous need that the small processor has for your information and know-how. The future mission can only be accomplished as it has been in the past, by getting out and into the plants regularly; by knowing plant operators and their representatives on a basis that is personal enough to gain their confidence. With every plant being a little different, and with different people in every plant, it means efforts to get them to let their hair down, getting them to talk to you, to explain their problems and to ask you for your ideas. It means more work than ever before. It means that as their needs expand for information on meat science, computers, office management techniques and even personnel, they'll call on you first and you've got to be prepared to tell them where to go for the help that you can't directly provide. Poor management can put a business under even faster than lack of proper curing techniques. It may mean that you will have to train other generalists, such as county extension service personnel. You can give *them* some basic information but also let them know where *they* can go for more detailed or specific help . . . namely, you and your associates.

You'll have to be more of a generalist than ever before and still share your time in answering the needs of the pork producers, the beef councils, the 4-H clubs, livestock shows, retailers and even the county and state fair folks.

Seminars, short courses and workshops are great and play an important role, but they are not for everybody, since many operators never leave their plants. I would encourage you to develop them, but to also look at the possibility of working even closer with state processor associations. Develop columns or letters that will be widely circulated. In some states, no effective organization even exists. Now there's a challenge and a reward that you wouldn't ever forget if an opportunity presented itself to help create a solid organization, to spark men's minds, to get them to reach out, to serve themselves and their country and the world better than ever before.

You'll be called upon even more heavily to defend your turf. With perhaps only three percent of our population directly involved in farming, and millions of Americans three, four and even five generations removed from agriculture in general, it will mean tough new fights for appropriations, explaining animal production to urbanites who think that those meat

packages magically appear at the local A & P meat case, and doubtless, new criticism for not siding with the so-called "public interest", professional "consumerist" positions on many issues. But it is a challenge that is too important not to be answered, and a job that continues to be handed over to some of the toughest, hardest working and most appreciated people we know . . . the extension meat scientists.

Thank you again for your kindness and hospitality and for allowing me to participate in this important industry conference.

**American Association of Meat Processors Member Plant Profile**  
1-1-82

**Cumulative totals for all firms reporting**

	<i>Total Returns: 744</i>	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent</i>
AAMP members with inspected meat plants	573	77
Retail exempt operations	98	13
Custom exempt operations	177	24
<b>Number of employees:</b>		
Full time		
1 - 5	367	49
6 - 10	191	25
11 - 20	109	15
21 - 30	24	3
31 - 40	8	1
41 - 50	8	1
Over 50	28	4
Part time		
1 - 10	527	70
11 - 20	15	2
21 - 30	4	.1
Over 30	2	.1
Total number of employees	10,238	
Average No. of employees per plant	14	

<b>Products handled:</b>		
Beef	721	97
Pork	716	96
Veal	282	38
Lamb	425	57
Poultry	270	36
Cured meats	602	81
<b>Do you slaughter?</b>		
Yes	519	70
No	225	30

**Facilities under state surveillance**

	<i>Total Returns: 744</i>	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Inspection status:		
State inspected	337	45
Retail exempt	47	6
Custom exempt	59	8

**Number of employees:**

<b>Full time</b>		
1 - 5	197	26
6 - 10	107	14
11 - 20	63	8
21 - 30	12	2
31 - 40	3	0.1
41 - 50	3	0.1
Over 50	5	1

<b>Part time</b>		
1 - 10	292	40
11 - 20	7	1
21 - 30	2	0.1
Over 30	0	0
Total number of employees	4,019	
Average No. of employees per plant	10	

**Products handled:**

Beef	386	52
Pork	384	51
Veal	140	18
Lamb	221	29
Poultry	122	16
Cured meats	318	43

**Do you slaughter?**

Yes	296	40
No	95	13

**Facilities under federal surveillance**

<b>Inspection status:</b>		
Federal inspected	236	32
Retail exempt	51	7
Custom exempt	118	16

**Number of employees:**

<b>Full time</b>		
1 - 5	170	23
6 - 10	84	12
11 - 20	46	6
21 - 30	12	2
31 - 40	5	—
41 - 50	5	—
Over 50	23	3

**Part time**

1 - 10	235	32
11 - 20	9	1
21 - 30	2	—
Over 30	2	—

Total number of employees	6,219	
Average No. of employees per plant	18	

**Products handled:**

Beef	335	45
Pork	332	45
Veal	142	19
Lamb	204	28
Poultry	148	20
Cured meats	284	38

**Do you slaughter?**

Yes	223	30
No	130	17