

Official Title:
Strategies and Weak Links for
Viable Small-Scale Meat
Production

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Unofficial Title:
“The God’s honest truth is, it just
ain’t that simple.”

Jimmy Buffet
“Fruitcakes”

Bottom line up front

- Executive summary? See unofficial title.
- Meat production and produce production are not the same.
- Produce (truck) and fruit production is relatively simple, (albeit seasonal) and can be heavily localized.
MORE SECURE, ALTHOUGH SEASONAL
- Meat production for continuous retail sales and consumption is far more complex, involves a lot more governmental interface, and relies on a FAR BROADER “support shed.”
- And it’s riskier... LESS SECURE, ALTHOUGH LESS SEASONAL.
- And...local production tends to be costlier than commodity imports.

Three security paradigms: BANK VAULTs, PARENTS & DANDELIONS

- BANK VAULT: Few baskets, many eggs, well guarded, access limited to chosen few. Concentrated wealth doled out by those in control.
CURRENT PARADIGM
- PARENTS: Many baskets, few eggs in each. Active involvement, but valuable product released into world on own at some point. (Animal husbandry?)
- DANDELIONS: Everywhere, openly available to the masses. Although promiscuously available, of minimal individual value.

Production Continuum

Production Type	Numbers / Type Production	Start Up Costs	Where Processed / availability	Where Consumed	Entry into Local Food Chain
"Backyard" flock / herd	Small / single batch	\$10s – 100s	On farm or "custom" processor / a bare sufficiency	On farm / friends	Minimal
Sequential, serial, small batch production	Varies according to species – per batch? onesies (cattle) to low hundreds	\$1,000s – 10,000s	Small scale processor / nowhere near enough – <i>WEAKEST LINK IN THIS CHAIN</i>	Retail purchasers / local "slow food" (nonchain) restaurants	Direct sales / farmer's markets / small scale distributors and retail sellers
Commodity flock / herd	Massive / numerous huge batches - CAFO	\$100,000s to \$Millions	Commercial (often vertically integrated) massive facility / a sufficiency	Retail purchasers / institutional users / chain restaurants	Current paradigm – this IS the local food chain

In an ideal world...

FARMER → CONSUMER



OR

FARMER → DISTRIBUTOR → CONSUMER

In the real world...

- INPUTS.....
 - Direct inputs
 - Indirect inputs / capital support structure
- FARMER.....
- TRANSPORT.....
- PROCESSING.....
- TRANSPORT.....
- DISTRIBUTOR/RETAILER.....
- CONSUMER

- ...and that's the simple version.

- Now...let's deconstruct that 'Laundry List' for several protein-rich farm products...

Example One: Eggs

- Direct Inputs:
 - Chicks (to be raised for pullets) – MO, by mail
 - Energy for brooder – propane or electricity
 - Feed (not USDA certified organic) – locally raised and ground (Southern States COOP, C'ville)
 - Oyster shell – Mobile, AL
 - Pine shavings – southern VA, via hardware store
 - Cartons (100% recycled plastic) – Germany via IA
 - Labels for cartons – Staples (US made)

Example One: Eggs, Con't.

- Indirect Inputs
 - Coop – FARMTEK, IA plus variety of hardware and lumber
 - Home Source Hardware, Fork Union, VA – US, Canada, China, Mexico
 - Laying boxes – recycled from Buckingham VA plus mats from IA and repair parts and primer – Tractor Supply and Home Source
 - Field fencing and solar energizers – Premier Fencing, IA, but system of German manufacture
 - Hoovers – bought at Poultry Suppliers, Amelia VA, installed by Economy Propane of Gordonsville VA
 - Feeders – FARMTEK, IA
 - Netting – FARMTEK, IA, Home Source, Fork Union VA
 - 10 X 12 Feed house – built of materials from Home Source (Fork Union VA) and 84 Lumber (Albemarle County)

Example One: Eggs, Con't.

- So...are these eggs “local?”
- How secure are these inputs?
 - Mix of security models

Example Two: USDA Certified Organic Meat Chickens

- Direct Inputs:
 - Chicks (to be raised for pullets) – MO, by mail
 - Energy for brooders – propane (brooder coop is off grid)
 - Feed (USDA certified organic)
 - 50 lb bags – closest source was PA (\$22.00 a bag, no volume discount)
 - Bulk (1 ton minimum) – Rockingham Mills, Harrisonburg VA – still about 50% higher than locally grown and milled non-organic
 - Pine shavings – southern VA, via hardware store
 - (Local bulk source had quality and availability problems)
 - Pasture seed (organic) – grasses and clover – Lancaster PA

Example Two: USDA Certified Organic Meat Chickens, Cont.

- Indirect Inputs
 - Coop – FARMTEK, IA plus variety of hardware and lumber – Home Source Hardware, Fork Union, VA – US, Canada, China, Mexico
 - Field shelters - FARMTEK, IA plus variety of hardware and lumber – Home Source Hardware, Fork Union, VA – US, Canada, China, Mexico
 - Field fencing and solar energizers – Premier Fencing, IA, but system of German manufacture
 - Hoovers – bought at Poultry Suppliers, Amelia VA, installed by Economy Propane of Gordonsville VA
 - Feeders – FARMTEK, IA
 - Netting – FARMTEK, IA, Home Source, Fork Union VA
 - 10 X 12 Feed house – built of materials from Home Source (Fork Union VA) and 84 Lumber (Albemarle County)
 - Tractor – Richmond VA
 - Implements – Richmond, Charlottesville, Orange
 - Fuel – Buckingham County

Example Two: USDA Certified Organic Meat Chickens, Cont.

- Processing – AA Farms (formerly Blue Barn Farm), Talleyville VA (east of Richmond)
 - This is one of two USDA or State inspected poultry processors capable of premium quality processing for the retail market, and is (to our knowledge) the only one USDA certified for organic processing
- **PROCESSING is the WEAK LINK in the local meat production chain – essentially single source**

Example Two: USDA Certified Organic Meat Chickens, Cont.

- Transportation – Our farm, Hilldale, is located about 30 miles from the Organic Butcher of C’ville – our primary customer. Seems fairly local source, doesn’t it?
- BUT – Processor is east of Richmond. We have to drive 406 miles to have our birds processed. (From farm to processor with birds, back to farm, back to processor (regulated cooling period), to store with processed birds)

A Couple of Questions:

- Anyone here representing:
 - Southern States COOP of Charlottesville?
 - Orange-Madison Southern States COOP?
 - Augusta COOP?
 - Tractor Supply?
 - Agri Supply Company of Virginia? (Petersburg – closest source for many implement repair parts)
 - Any feed mills? (Rockingham Mills, for instance?)
 - Tractor and implement dealers (Orange? Goochland?)
 - Local butcher shops?
 - Local organic food retailers? (Feast? Rebecca's?)

My Point

- Behind the farmer, any farmer, is a substantial network of supporters: feed and seed companies, implement dealers, specialist suppliers, fertilizer and field amendment distributors (lime, chicken litter, “bio-solids”, etc.), processors, canners, etc.
- It’s a symbiotic relationship: Without enough farmers, these supporters can’t exist. Without the supporters, farmers have a tough time of it.
- Therefore, demographic density of farming is a critical factor for local food production, and thus food security.

Economies of Scale Issues, Too

- Local sequential serial producers (as needed to provide continuous supply for the local food chain) face real dis-economies of scale
- Example: Big agri-business can play futures market to lock in feed prices; little guys are subject to rising feed prices almost immediately
- Example: Big guys own and control their own processing plants; little guys use second party and are thus subject to whims of others
- And so it goes...

Bottom Line

- Executive summary? “The God’s honest truth is, it just ain’t that simple.” Not just: farmer to consumer or farmer to distributor to consumer.
- Meat production and produce production are not the same.
- Produce (truck) and fruit production is relatively simple, (albeit seasonal, so far) and can be heavily localized. MORE SECURE, ALTHOUGH SEASONAL
- Meat production for continuous retail sales and consumption is far more complex, involves a lot more governmental interface, and relies on a FAR BROADER “support shed.”
- And it’s riskier... LESS SECURE, ALTHOUGH LESS SEASONAL.
- And...local production tends to be costlier than commodity imports.
- But...

Remember Dean

- Dean Okimoto – Waimanalo HI – (High School classmate)
- 4 acres inherited from father, about 45 minutes to an hour's drive from Honolulu (800,000 population)
- Growing salad greens and herbs, intensively
- Biggest tool? 45HP Category 1 New Holland tractor and a PTO driven rotary cultivator
- Employs about a dozen – laborers: \$9.00/hr, plus SS/Medicare plus medical benes; farm manager; self
- Sales? Direct, retailers, restaurants
- **Gross? About \$ 1 MILLION a year**
- Oh, yeah, and he's president of the Hawaii Farm Bureau

Questions?