

An Important Link in the Sustainable Food System

“They are a delight to work with, both innovative and flexible with new products and packaging,” says Scott Barao of Hedgeapple Farm in Maryland. Barao, a certified humane Angus beef producer, who travels 90 miles to work with Smucker’s Quality Meats in Mount Joy (Lancaster Co.). Scott wasn’t able to find a USDA inspected facility in his area, a common problem among small livestock producers across the country that need butchers who are willing to work one-on-one with customers, handle smaller quantities and create custom products.

Since 1965, Smucker’s Quality Meats has been a family-owned business and today is a USDA-inspected slaughter, fabricating and processing plant, which includes vacuum packaging and flash freezing. Along with 20 full-time and part-time employees, Jay Smucker and his two sons Mike (director of food safety) and Jason (production manager), process beef, pork and bison, as well as some sheep and goats.

According to Mike, “A majority of our customers found us via word of mouth. We really didn’t do much advertising,” he says. “Many of the producers we work with found us within the last 2–3 years. All of their operations vary in size in, but the bulk of them are in the Lancaster area. We currently process about 20–25 head per week,” he continued.

Bob Hershey is a grass-fed beef producer has been working with the Smucker’s for years. He also owns a retail outlet, Hershey Harvest in Reading, which sells mostly prepared foods, but is now marketing his frozen beef.


A newer customer, Phillip Horst-Landis of Meadow Run Farm in Lititz (Lancaster Co.) said, “I am impressed with their animal handling skills. The pens and set-up are much gentler than other places I have seen, which lessens the stress on the animals. They also are very committed to working with smaller-scale farmers. We personally are still working out the kinks in our production schedule and other details. But it is nice having them nearby so we are able to sell and deliver fresh meat to our markets.”

According to Mike, “We have been working to create better flow for moving the animals to reduce stress. You can tell a difference in the carcass quality if an animal has been under stress. We have also attended workshops by Temple Grandin and read her research in regards to treating animals humanely and reducing their stress.



Jay Smucker and his two sons Mike and Jason of Smucker’s Quality Meats. The company has been serving livestock producers since 1965.

In addition to custom butchering, Smucker’s also produces value-added products such as barbecue, jerky and sausage in addition to ham and bacon. About half of the sausage and hams they produce is nitrate free. Smucker’s themselves also wholesales their own barbecue and beef jerky to independent grocers, which is about a quarter of their business. But according to Mike “Our main business is to be the processor between the producer and the consumer — not to market the beef products, but rather our services. Educating consumers is a big part of this and something we really enjoy. Instead of retailing, we’re interested in helping customers develop consumer markets for their product.” ■




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