The future of Meat Processing:

A hypothetical solution to the region's production bottleneck

After decades of industry consolidation that overwhelmed meat producers across the country, the Covid-19 crisis raised public awareness of the issue and catalyzed significant investment. Three critical developments occurred in Greater Cincinnati focused on rebuilding the needed infrastructure for processing and cold storage so that local farmers can thrive.

In Highland County, OH, a retiree invested his life savings and family land to build a mobile slaughter unit and two cold storage facilities that can serve farmers east of Cincinnati. In Oxford, OH, a young father with a construction business and a cattle yard built an 8,000-head USDA certified meat processing facility. And in Cincinnati, a group of workers bought out Stehlin's, a custom slaughter facility, to create a worker-owned processing plant. Combined, these three businesses provided the capacity for local farmers to transport their cattle short distances and sell into local and regional markets.

This transformed the economic opportunities for cattle and hog producers. Very small producers raising grass-grazed animals could reliably get slaughter dates, and so began to expand their herds, increase sales, and increase their incomes. Conventionally raised cattle provided essential year-round supply for the facilities, and institutions that could trace their sources started buying local and supporting these producers. These new supply chains removed many of the middlemen so that farmers were paid a greater share of the final price, while institutions did not see a meaningful cost increase. These investments were a significant financial boost for the rural communities in the region, creating wealthier farmers and more jobs that infused energy and dollars into the family farm and local economy.

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