

Brief for the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Agri- Foods Canada

Processing Capacity

On  
Pork in Nova Scotia

Presented  
January 28, 2021  
Margaret L Lamb  
Chair of Pork Nova Scotia

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food  
Re: Processing Capacity – Pork NS  
January 28, 2021

### **Addressing Committee**

Mr. Chair Finnigan, Vice Chairs, Members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food Canada, and other invitees. On behalf of Pork Nova Scotia, I would like to thank you for the invitation to address this committee in regards to Processing Capacity as it relates to pork production and processing in Nova Scotia. Some of what I have to say will be indicative of the Maritime Provinces as the changes in the industry continues to impact producers throughout the region similarly.

### **My Background**

I am Margie Lamb, I own a hundred- fifty sow, farrow to finish hog operation which I am in is in the process of selling through a share agreement. In addition to growing the pigs my late husband and I began in the early 1990's to process added value products selling directly off farm adding both a wholesale and a catering component to our business. In addition, my husband did sales, grew grain, at one time milling our own feed. In 2005 after retiring from teaching I worked full time until the fall of 2019. I am now involved from a distance.

Prior to Jim's death the farm had transitioned through many phases over the years.

All producers faced economic challenges presented by selling in an open market such as low and fluctuating prices, high grain prices, high US dollar, excess hogs on the world market, disease challenges like PED and loss of infrastructure be it from feed mills, processing plant relocating or, suspension of kill floor services, for ourselves to barn fire added to the struggles and influenced cash flow and borrowing power.

When my late husband became ill, I took his place on the Pork board and have since become the chair of the board and come to speak to you today in that capacity.

### **Industry Background**

Pork production in Nova Scotia was an industry that was encouraged to expand in the 1970's the feed freight assistance program that purchased western grain help offset the difference in feed costs between the Maritimes and Central Canada , this program was discontinued July 1, 1995 ,had been a great help in sustaining the industry.

Nova Scotia hog farmers worked to become educated on the best production methods, the province became recognized across Canada for its high production standards and meat quality.

At one time there were 225 active members of Pork NS, with industry decline the number of producers went

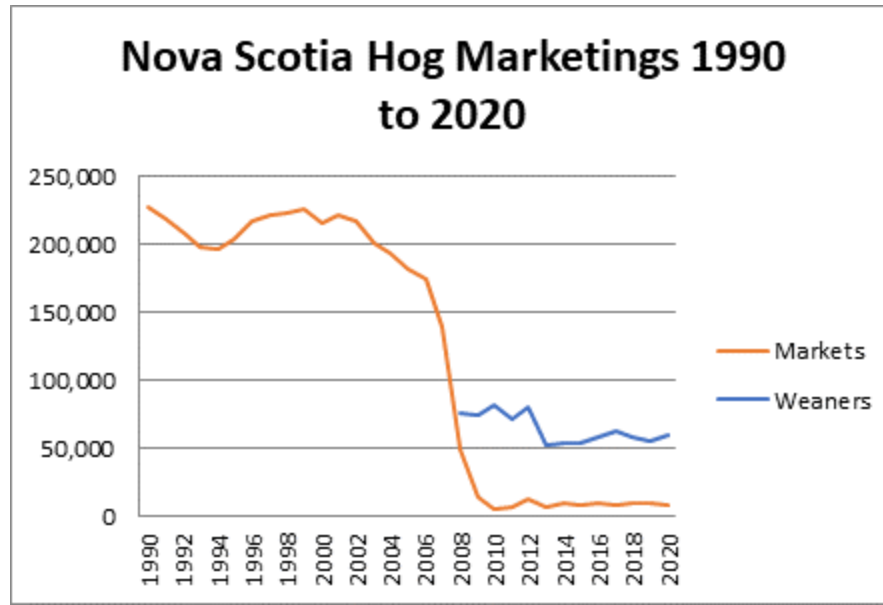


Figure 1

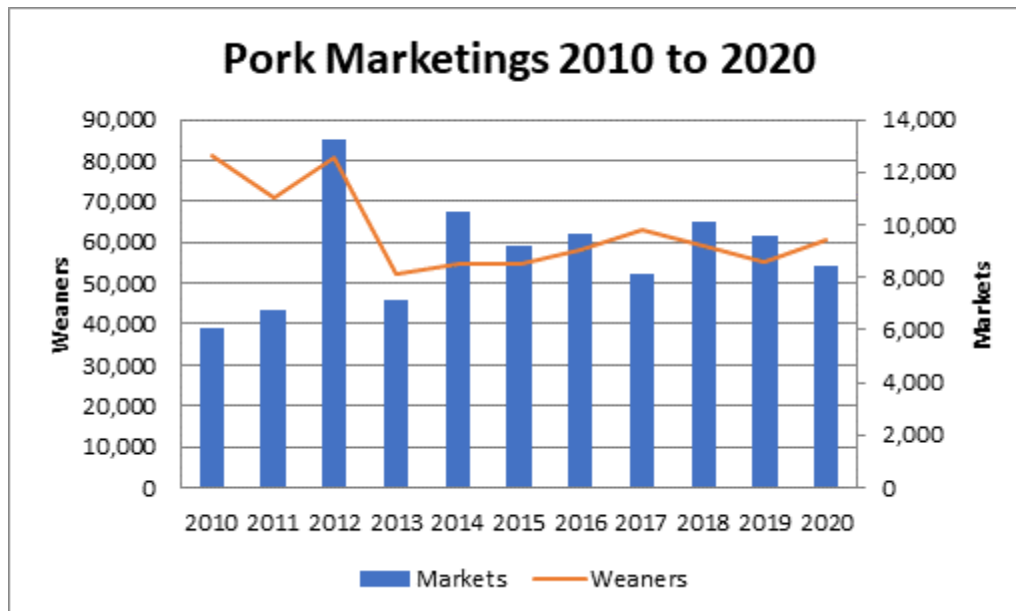


Figure 2

down to 125 in the 80's, the sharpest reduction in producers and hogs happened between 2006 and 2009 when production dropped from 200 000 to 10 000 market hogs. By 2016 eight (8) commercial

producers grew the bulk of the 12 000 market hogs annually and by 2020 there were just under 8500 market hogs recorded as marketed, a portion of those being shipped to Quebec for processing.

Presently, 3 producers of the 8 who transitioned to isoweans (weaned piglets) sales, produce 98% of weaned piglets (55-60 thousand annually) which are sold into Quebec and Ontario to be grown to market size.

In the 1990's, all commercial pigs were shipped through the marketing board. Most were shipped within the province to one of four facilities in Nova Scotia. Larsen Packers alone had the capacity to run 10 000 hogs per week. Of the four plants, two are no longer in business in Nova Scotia- one closed the other moved its business to Manitoba, the remaining two import federally inspected pork to run their operations (one is federally inspected the other is provincial) in order to either export nationally .access markets requiring federal inspection or have enough product to process..

At one time, there were federally inspected abattoirs in each Maritime province that provided both custom kill and further value added processing.

Even at the peak of production, Nova Scotia only produced 65 % of the pork it consumed, making it an importer of pork. The province became a dumping ground for pork products to aid in keeping prices up in other regions. Pressure was known to be put on local processors by retailers to meet or beat import prices or have orders cancelled.

Presently, a between 3-4 % of the pork sold in Nova Scotia is locally grown, of that 97-98 % is provided by one other producer and myself.

Pork NS through been talking with the provincial government, has seen government working with the owners of provincially inspected abattoirs to increase cooling capacity and make other upgrades. This support has taken away some of the immediate and critical concerns of collapse however; it does not address other issues or needs.

Work the past four years to build a business and marketing plan to get federally inspected abattoir built while not jeopardizing present abattoirs found that of the 22 Nova Scotia provincial abattoirs 12 process red meat, of these 12 all are: mixed species, have increased seasonal demand for services and are at capacity

Additionally, approximate 90 backyard facilities exist which work on a cash economy. \*

Long before COVID-19 we lived in a time of multiple crises and responsibilities which our Canadian government recognizes.

**Investment and Access to Federally Inspected Abattoirs** are a means of addressing several outcomes that the government has on their mandate, while aiding in stabilizing the pork industry in the province / region, which will bring opportunities for spin off services to strengthen and be once again invested into.

Federally inspected facilities to meet market size animals and another to process cull sows will prove most beneficial. Go right size, and grow organically.

**Federal Inspection is a must** as it allows access to numerous market opportunities within the province, the region, the nation and internationally should growth allow. Federal inspection can help in a disease outbreak either of human disease or animal disease. In addition, it would be prudent for the federal Government to negotiate during trade deals for zones within Canada that could mitigate shut down of exports in a disease outbreak such as was seen with BSE.

The Atlantic/ Maritime region would make a reasonable zone due to our ability to be closed fairly easily from other areas Nova Scotia's present example of control of the COVID -19 holds true for some animals diseases as well such as PURRS.

**Environmental initiatives** - can be supported by having abattoirs close to animal production. The Carbon footprint of pork for the present value-added processing facilities in the Maritimes, if accessed locally would be a positive as: which would help their marketing A) buy local movement B) carbon footprint

- presently 95-95 % of pork is imported into the province.
- one load of market hogs or isoweans travelling to Quebec round trip consumes about 800 liters of fuel to take 180-190 market hogs, while cull sows require more transport space
- Processors also would be able to market using the Buy local movement and positive change in their footprint

**Food Security and Food Sovereignty**, Lack and scarcity of food will cause citizens to panic. Here in Nova Scotia the Tantarmar Marsh is under increased treat of being breached. This has been true for decades, with climate again playing an increased role. This is the only land crossing into the province for both rail and trucks. In addition to human food ...animal feed, fuel and toilet paper (and we all know how crucial toilet paper has become with the pandemic) will all be cut off. Presently we have at maximum a three day supply of food in the province.

**Animal Welfare** A number of concerns regarding the welfare of livestock could be addressed with access to abattoirs in the province. (federal inspection is not critical for welfare however it is critical to meet capacity and access to market opportunities.

- Transporting animals has always been as concern for farmers we are all too aware of the stress on our livestock and the unforeseen storms and break downs , slowing for checkpoints such as during COVID- an issue as air flow is a must on loaded trucks
- Better access helps meet new regulations require shorter transport times / as we face increased pressure from animal activists

**Financial Well Being-** federally inspected abattoir is not inexpensive, and is not initially profitable, but that infrastructure is crucial so that producers can increase supply and be profitable.

Profitability of the abattoir is not what is gained. It is the first step that leads to spin-off jobs and results within the community that cannot happen without it!

- Federally inspected product allows for EXPORT
- Federal slaughter allows access to sales in the existing processing facilities in the region (both federal and provincial plants) that use federally inspected meats to process all or some of their products
- Access to potential sales to large retailers,
- Sales access to government institutions such as health care, long term care, prisons (Increases in budgets that **must be used to purchase local food** in each region of Canada)
- Create local jobs which in turn adds income and food security for families and communities as part of rural development sustainability initiatives
- Growth in the industry will lead to increase food sovereignty over time
- Abattoir projects would work to allow government to meet its obligation to their food policies- September 26, 2017 (point 4 states ...**must support the next generation of farmers promoting a diversity of farming practises and sizes**) and **to the right to food** (ratified in 1976).

In conclusion, time is running out to act, in my province. This has been the messaging for last 20 years as the downward pressures were met by further pressure from the very financial institutions meant to work with them. **Do not misunderstand me if something isn't going to work one has to change. But if only financial projections are used to see into the future, they do not tell the whole story** if that were the case my husband and I should have been out of business 30 times in the last thirty years, we did not get bigger we changed, our hog numbers are smaller while our employee numbers are 12 times larger.

Family farms are not run by CEO's, they are run on blood, sweat, and integrity and the one thing 99 % percent of farmers will do, is that they will go to their grave to meet their obligations. Their farms are like your homes, not just a place to go to work, but a place to live.

I do appreciate that as leaders the public will never agree with what you may decide, there will always be risks in your decisions, to some you will have made a positive difference in their lives.

Lastly, in my opinion projects studied for years without concrete solutions amounts to in- action and procrastination which are both actions that result in huge expenditures with not return on investment. Your recommendations and support make all the difference.

Thank you for your time

**Pork Nova Scotia** Pork Nova Scotia's mandate is to carry out the purchase and sale of hogs in the province as well as to maintain a sustainable hog industry and a favourable environment for the production of pork in Nova Scotia. To fulfill this mandate PNS organizes inter-provincial hog sales, works with stakeholders to promote the production and consumption of local pork as well as work with industry specialists to deliver industry programs related to hog production.

References and information for this presentation was gathered through

Board business meeting notes and records

- Graphs
- Studies (Since 2010 include Value Chain Alignment \$225K, Premium Brand Development \$90 K -actual physical results...still usable, Slaughter feasibility \$4K Market Development (SMU project) \$2K, Slaughter breakeven \$3K , Market Review ( Brogan report ) \$15 K which recommended further studies components
- Tony and Meadowbrook projects would be another \$25-\$50 K
- Prior to 2010 PNS hired a Marketing development specialist with a cost of \$250K for that project
- Plus, administrative costs not captured would be in the \$40K
- Cost incurred by producers in their project work is not captured)

Nova Scotia Abattoirs Under inspection Plant and facility info sheet, NS Dept of Environment

The Right to Food In Canada – internet

New Article ... Pig Farmer few and Far between by :Sara Keddy Mar. 19 2010 up dated Sept 29, 2017.

**From Patchwork to Policy Coherence: new Directions for Canadian Food Policy;** presentation to the Standing Committee of Agriculture, Diane Bronson , Executive Director , Food Secure Canada , September 26, 2017

Discussion with Paul Larsen – former Chair of Pork PEI

Personal experiences and involvement in: business, Chair of Pork NS , CPC, abattoir investigation ( Jan 2017- fall 2019) and past discussions with community members and farmers