

Livestock Extension Programming in Maine During the Pandemic

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Livestock producers in Maine have found many ways profit from the livestock they raise. Primarily they strive to be efficient in their care and feeding to minimize costs while providing healthy food and environment for their stock. They also look for a variety of ways to sell their animals for increased farm income including the live animal market channels, such as auctions, as well as wholesale and retail market channels, such as carcass sales or cuts of meat direct to restaurants or consumers.

As livestock farmers get more and more animals, their attention to marketing becomes more diversified and they look to places that give a higher return. Many look to meat sales direct to consumers to try to increase their market options. Meat sales require a higher level of involvement from the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (MDACF) as these animals need to go through a state or federal inspected facility to be sold in commerce. The farm's label doesn't need to be attached if they use the slaughterhouse "house" label and have the licenses to distribute.

Educational Objectives

Provide Maine farmers with information to efficiently produce and market livestock to a variety of market opportunities using available technology.

Program Activities

Virtual and Recorded Programs

Livestock Production Information

Twenty-one virtual educational programs on livestock care and marketing have been offered throughout 2020 and the start of 2021. Extension staff use live Zoom, live-stream to Facebook, recorded programs, short video clips, etc. to keep farmers informed about their options for funding, marketing, Covid-19 safety, as well as production information.

Virtual agriculturally oriented programs that were recorded include:

- [Rats and Other Vermin Control on the Farm](#)
- [Got Livestock Need Hay?](#)
- [Raising Backyard Pigs](#)
- [Backyard Poultry Part 1](#)
- [Backyard Poultry Part 2](#)
- [Animal Health ID Swine](#)
- [Animal Health ID Sheep](#)
- [Animal Health ID Goat](#)
- [Animal Health ID Beef](#)
- [Basics of Livestock Photography](#)

- [Selling Meat in Maine – Red Meat Focus](#)
- [Selling Meat in Maine – Poultry Focus](#)

Website Development and Enhancement

Several livestock websites were updated and expanded to include more detailed information on the Covid-19 information and support for livestock producers, production and marketing information for livestock producers.

- [Poultry Website](#)
- [Sheep and Goat Website](#)
- [Swine Website](#)
- [Beef Website](#)

Publication Development and Updates

With increased demand for accurate, up-to-date information a number of UMaine Extension livestock oriented publications that were developed or updated.

- Bulletin #2227, [Maine Poultry Facts: Lighting For Small-Scale Flocks](#)
- Bulletin #2187 [Poultry Facts: Turkey Brooding and Management: Giving Poults a Good Start](#)
- Bulletin #1004 [Equine Facts: Guide to First-Time Horse Ownership](#)
- Bulletin #1048 [Selling Beef in Maine](#)
- Bulletin #2072 [Maine Poultry Facts: Hatching Your Own Chicks](#)
- Bulletin #2221 [Simple Steps to Starting Healthy Chicks in Maine](#)
- Bulletin #2222, [Nutrition for Backyard Chicken Flocks in Maine](#)

Teaching Methods

The details of direct marketing meat may seem daunting, but the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (UMaine Extension) and the MDACF sponsored two sessions on “Selling Meat in Maine” for red meat producers and for poultry producers by Zoom, live-streamed to Facebook and recorded sessions so clients could access the information asynchronously through YouTube. Follow-up email included PowerPoint slides, links to videos, and speaker contract information. Speakers were from UMaine Extension, MDACF, and farmers who produce and processor livestock.

Program promotion included UMaine Extension Livestock website, Maine Farm Newsletter article, news releases to media, UMaine calendar listings, Facebook posts on UMaine Extension sites as well as Maine livestock and homestead Facebook groups.

Results

Virtual Programs:

The live Zoom sessions of 21 production-oriented agriculture programs had 426 people attend and the recordings of 12 of these programs were viewed by 2,582, over 6 times as many people viewed the recorded sessions after the program.

While clients say they prefer in-person programming, there is no doubt that Zoom sessions that are recorded and offered to those unable to attend in person will continue to be a new addition to future programs. Recently we have added live streaming to Facebook pages for the livestock sessions. As a result, three programs had 308 views on Facebook, most of these were after the session.

Of the 101 people who signed up for the Marketing Meat in Maine program, 67 attended one or both sessions live. Another 208 were reached through the Facebook live-streaming of the program. When registering people were asked if they raised livestock (75% yes) and what type of livestock they raised: 47% chickens, 33% beef, 23% swine, 18% sheep, 14% turkeys, and 13% goats.

A follow-up email with links to the recorded sessions and resources mentioned during the program was sent to 98 people with emails, 64 or 66% opened the email and 25 or 40% clicked on at least one link. 46 people viewed one or both video recordings from this email link.

Website Development and Enhancement

New or updated websites: In the past year the websites highlighted here had 38,630 views. Page views for the whole UMaine Extension Livestock website increased by 30% over the previous year.

Publications

The seven agriculture-oriented publications highlighted here had 8,414 views this past year.

Impact

Included in the Selling Meat in Maine follow-up email was a link to a program evaluation. Unfortunately, only 5 people completed the evaluation. All of them said they would definitely use the information presented. They estimated an average of \$94.50 per animal increase in income. The average number of animals for these respondents was 29, so an estimated increase in income per person who attended the sessions was \$2,693. The staff with the MDACF reported that they had one new 1,000 exemption and custom exempt farm, one new licensee, and a home processor, and received 4 other inquiries about livestock processing from program participants.

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