



Mobile Meat Processing in Central Minnesota: Survey of Livestock Producers

Brigid Tuck, Senior Economic Impact Analyst, and Ryan Pesch, Extension Educator
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Overview

During summer 2022, University of Minnesota Extension surveyed livestock producers in Central Minnesota. The survey's primary purpose was to collect information regarding current livestock production and processing in the region. The survey also gauged interest in expanding processing options, particularly through a potential mobile meat processing facility.

This report summarizes the results of the survey. In total, Extension received 60 responses. Survey respondents represented 12 counties, with the highest number of responses from Crow Wing (22) and Cass (10) Counties.

Survey results showed several factors work in favor of a potential mobile meat processing facility in Central Minnesota.

- Producers demonstrated a strong interest in the potential for a new processing facility, the opportunity for custom processing, and new outlets for their meat.
- Producers reported strong demand for meat in the region.
- There are many small farms looking for convenient locations to process their meat. Producers were less motivated to select their processor on price and placed higher importance on convenience.
- Producers indicated an interest in having a USDA-inspected facility in the region.
- Some farmers reported using local food outlets, and this could build upon the locally grown movement.



The survey also showed potential obstacles to the development of a new processing facility.

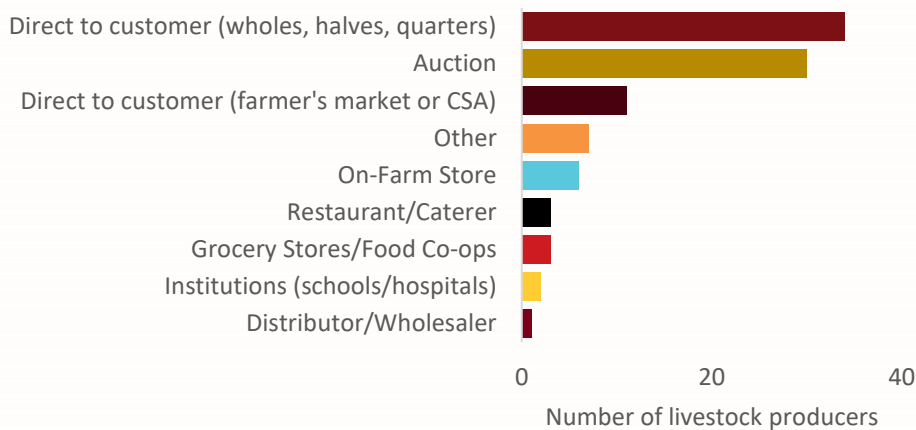
- Producers were mostly satisfied with their current livestock processors, which could make attracting them to a new processor challenging.
- Producers are aging. As they age, they are moving out of livestock production, which could decrease the availability of inputs in the future.

- Central Minnesota tends to have smaller livestock farms and fewer large producers, meaning it may take a broad depth of producers to source livestock consistently through the year.

Current Production and Processing

Producers reported selling their livestock through multiple channels (Chart 1). The most common types of sales were direct to customers (either as wholes, halves, or quarters), via auction, or direct to customer through a farmer’s market or CSA.

Chart 1: Current Livestock Sales Channels for Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Seven growers indicated “other” for their marketing channel. In the open-ended comments, most responses were a variation of processing the animal for their own consumption, or for sharing with family or friends.

While it is encouraging that many farmers sold direct to customers, the volume of animals processed for that purpose was relatively low (Table 1). Survey respondents reported selling 2,591 head of cattle in 2021. Only 295 went for local processing. In the open-ended comments, many farmers indicated they sold the majority of their cattle via auction but kept a few head for processing to sell (or give) to family or friends. Goats and sheep showed similar patterns, with only a fraction being sold for local processing.

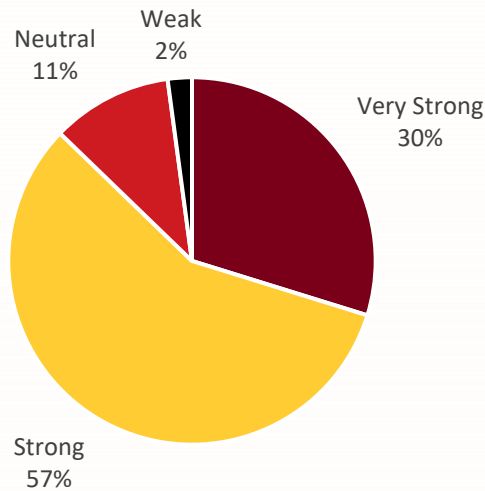
Hogs, on the other hand, were more likely to go to processing versus an auction. Of the 69 hogs sold, 67 went into processing. The “other” category primarily included poultry and rabbits.

Survey results also indicated relatively small farms in Central Minnesota. The average head of cattle sold per farm was 66, with only eight going to local processing.

Animal Type	Total Number Sold	Average Number Per Farm Sold	Total Number Processed	Average Number Per Farm Processed
Cattle	2,591	66	295	8
Hogs	69	14	67	13
Goats/Sheep	51	13	21	5
Other	780	195	208	69

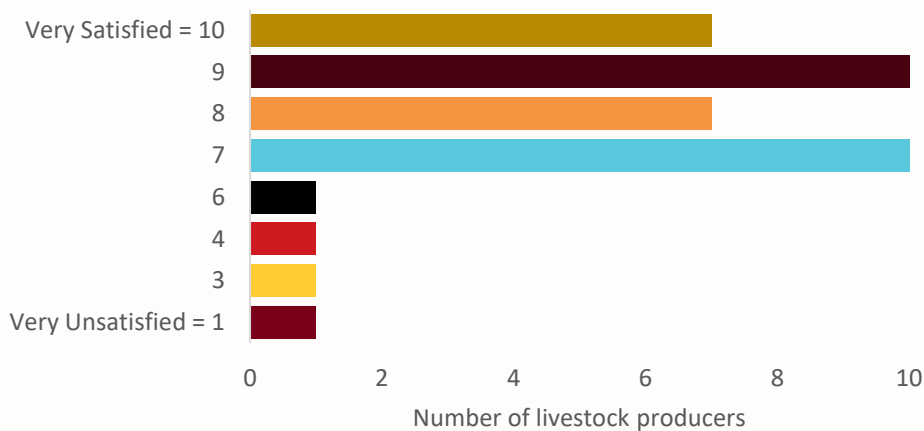
Livestock producers indicated the regional demand for their meat is strong. Eighty-seven percent said demand was “very strong” or “strong” (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Demand for Meat from Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



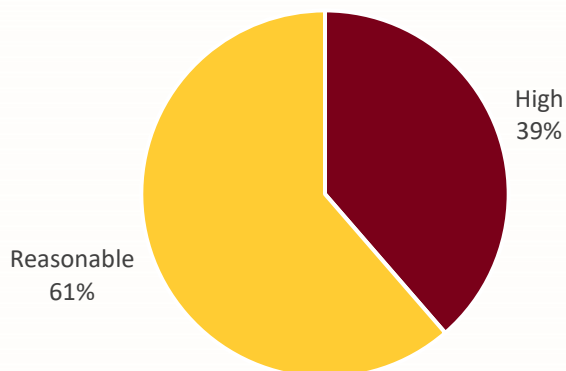
In general, livestock producers were satisfied with their current processor (Chart 3). When asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 (very unsatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied), most producers assigned a value of 7 or higher.

Chart 3: Level of Satisfaction with Current Processor, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Part of this satisfaction may stem from the fact that livestock producers find their current processing costs to be fairly reasonable (Chart 4). When asked to rate their current processing costs, 61 percent said they were reasonable, while only 39 percent said they were high.

Chart 4: Reasonability of Current Processing Costs, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota

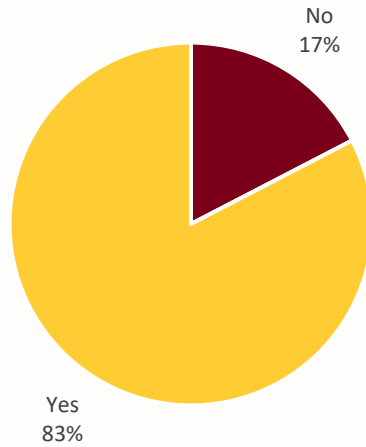


Costs of processing varied by animal type (Table 2). Producers reported spending an average of \$550 per cow, \$263 per hog, and \$115 per sheep/goat for processing.

Animal Type	Average Processing Cost per Animal	Min/Max Processing Costs	Average Distance One-Way to Processor	Min/Max One-Way Distance
Cattle	\$550	\$400/\$900	37 miles	1/150
Hogs	\$263	\$225/\$300	73 miles	70/75
Sheep/Goats	\$115	\$100/\$125	82 miles	20/200
Other	\$3.75	\$3.50/\$4.00	7.5 miles	0/15

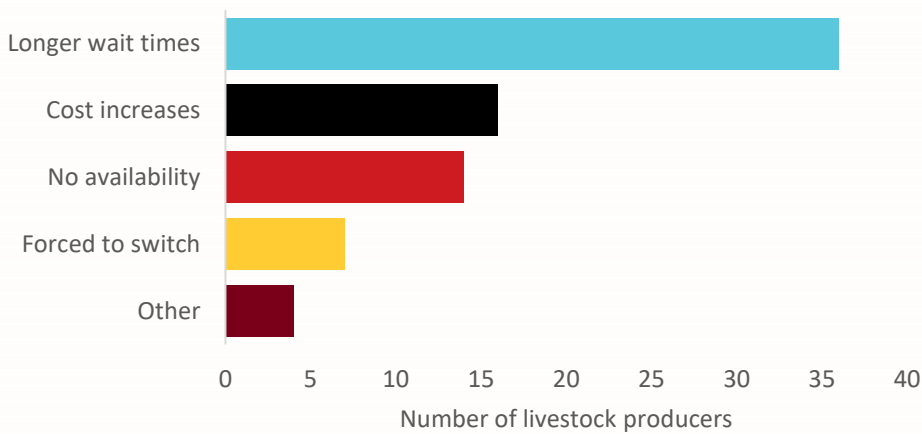
While in general producers were satisfied, they have experienced bottlenecks or access issues with their meat processor within the last year (Chart 5).

Chart 5: Have Experienced Bottleneck or Limited Access to Processing, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



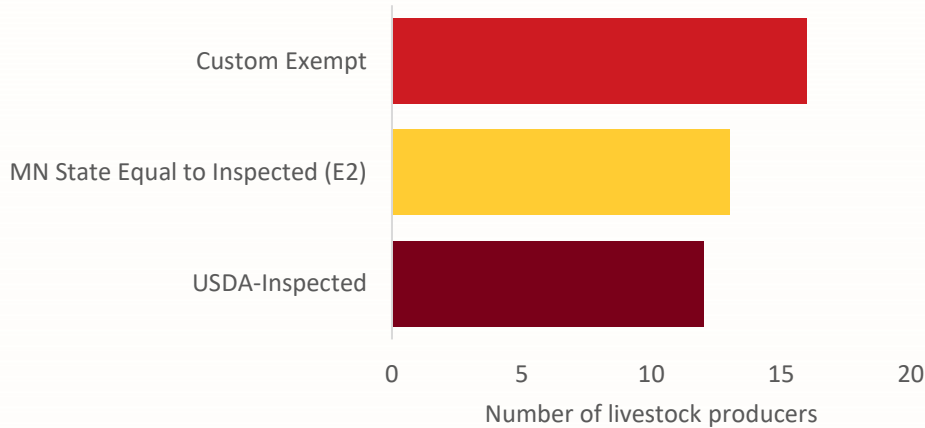
The primary issue that livestock producers encountered was longer wait times (Chart 6). Producers also faced cost increases, unavailability of processing, and a need to switch processors.

Chart 6: Types of Bottlenecks Experienced, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Livestock producers reported using a mix of processors, including custom exempt, E2, and USDA-inspected (Chart 7).

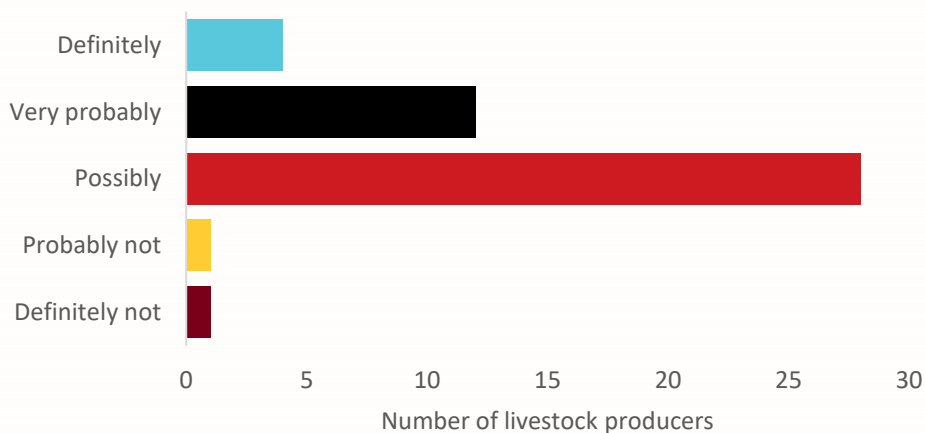
Chart 7: Type of Livestock Processor Used in 2021, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Interest in Expanded Processing Options

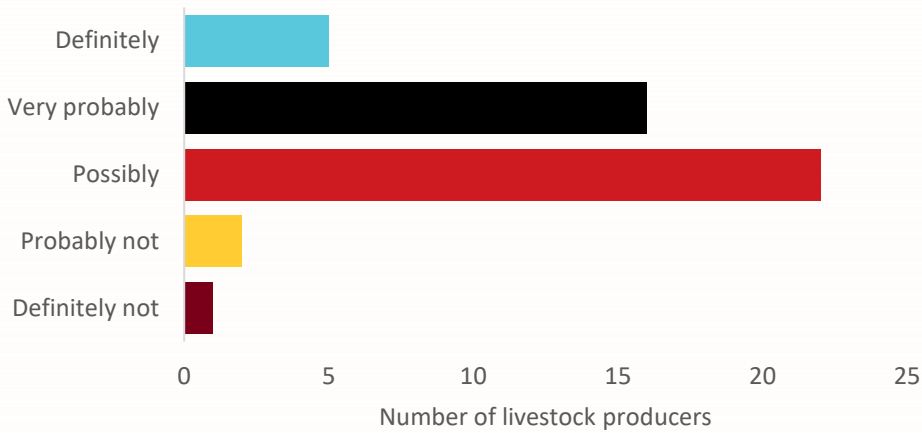
Livestock producers were interested in the potential for new processing, particularly the proposed mobile meat processing facility (Chart 8). One in three producers indicated they would “definitely” or “very probably” use the new facility. The remainder were mostly open to the possibility.

Chart 8: Likelihood of Using a New Mobile Meat Facility in the Region, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



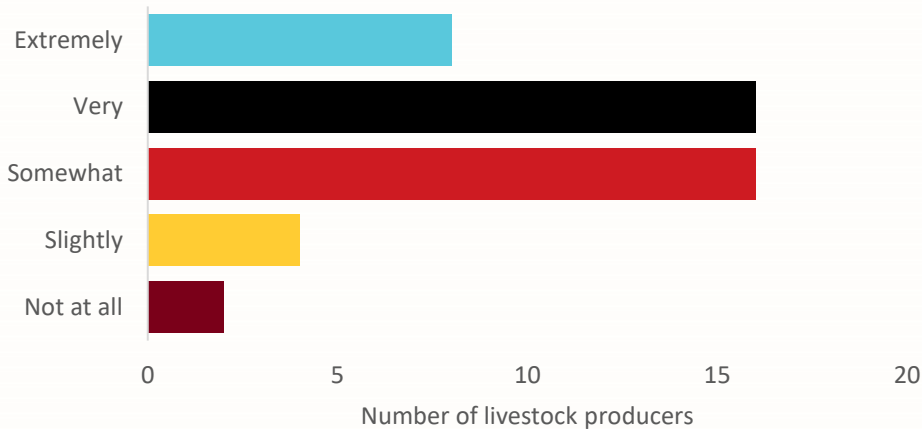
The opportunity for custom processing was also of interest to livestock producers (Chart 9). Nearly half of the producers said they would “definitely” or “very probably” use the new facility if it offered custom processing.

Chart 9: Likelihood of Custom Processing at New Mobile Meat Facility, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



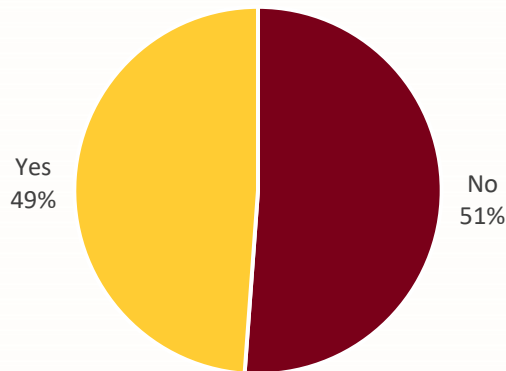
Livestock producers were seemingly interested in new sales or market outlets. More than half indicated they were “extremely” or “very” interested in new outlets (Chart 10).

Chart 10: Interest in New Sales/Market Outlets, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



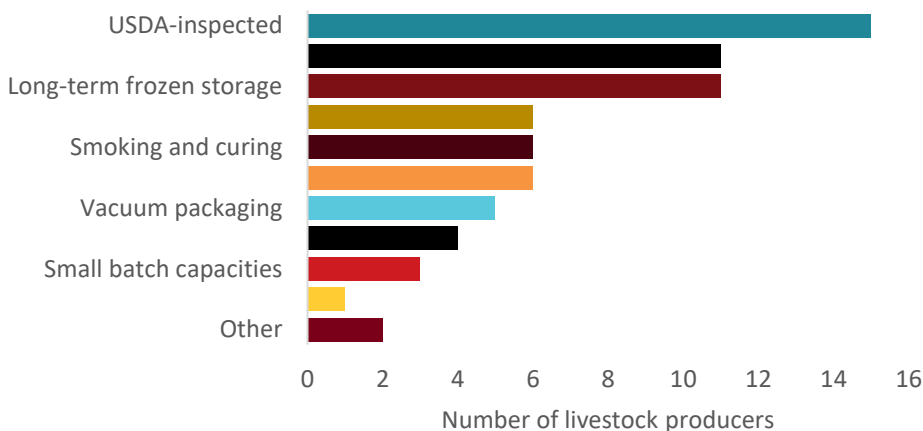
Cost was not a primary factor in producers' decision making regarding the choice of processor (Chart 11). When asked if cost would be a primary factor in their decision to change processors, slightly more than half indicated "no." In the open-ended comments, producers noted that convenience was more important to them than cost.

Chart 11: Cost as a Primary Factor in Processor Selection, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



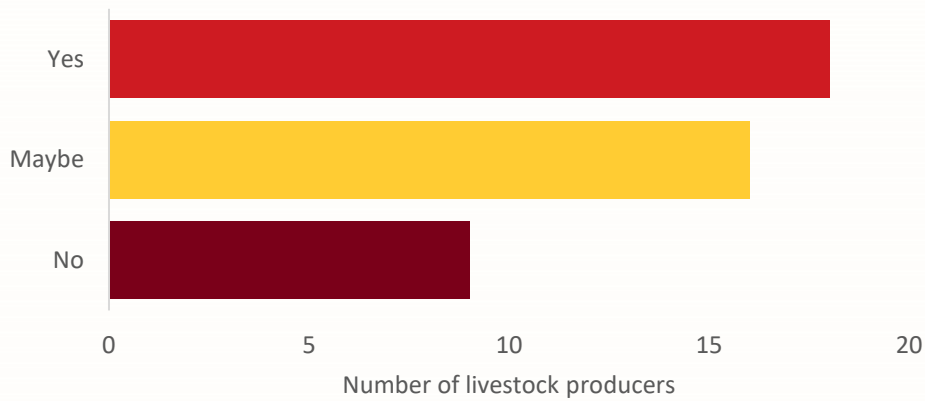
Livestock producers also showed an interest in having a USDA-inspected facility (Chart 12). Other services producers were interested in included marketing and sales support, long-term frozen storage, and value-added products.

Chart 12: Services Producers Would Like to Access, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Livestock producers indicated some willingness to increase production if they had access to a USDA-inspected facility (Chart 13).

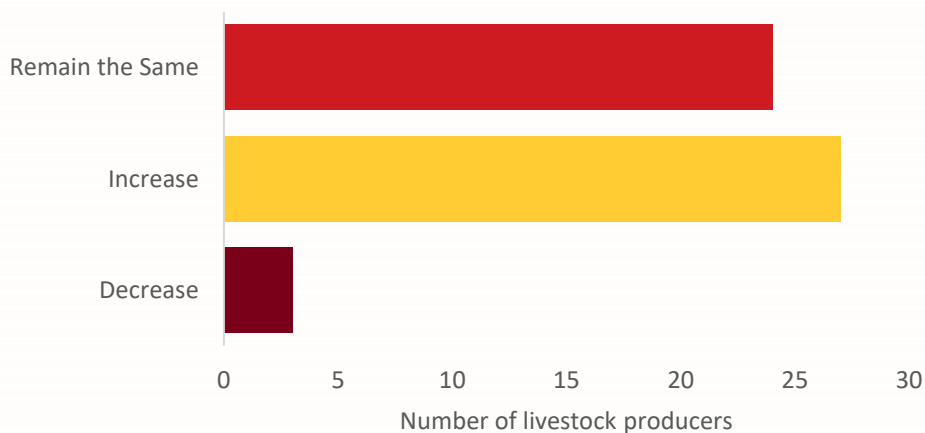
Chart 13: Producers Willingness to Increase Production With Access to a USDA-Inspected Facility, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Trends in Production

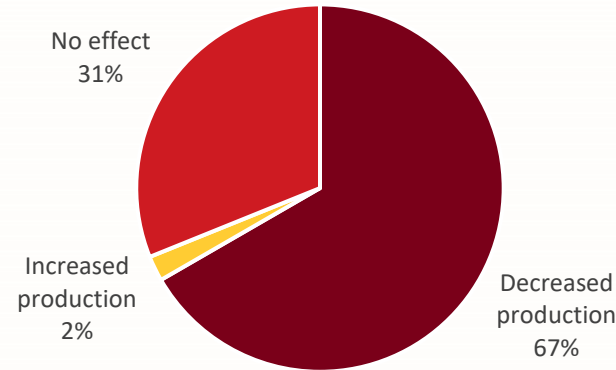
In general, livestock producers planned to grow slightly in 2023 (Chart 14). Half of respondents indicated they will increase the number of animals on their farm in 2023.

Chart 14: Plans for 2023 Production, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



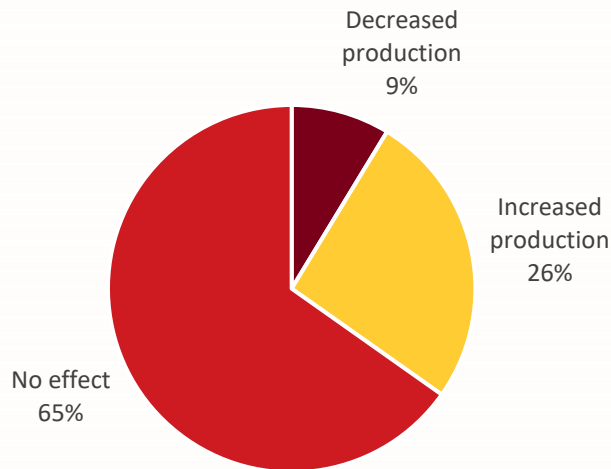
Part of the reason for the increase may be in reaction to the decreases in 2021. Central Minnesota experienced drought conditions during that year, which caused farmers to sell off parts of their herds, due to limited feedstocks for the winter. Two-thirds of producers decreased production in response to the drought (Chart 15).

Chart 15: Affect of Drought of Summer 2021 on Production, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Producers, however, indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have much of an impact on their operations (Chart 16).

Chart 16: Affect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Production, Survey Respondents in Central Minnesota



Conversations with Farmers

In addition to the survey, Extension conducted interviews with three large livestock producers in the region, since many survey respondents sold less than 50 animals annually.

The three livestock producers sold 100, 300, and 1,200 head on average each year, respectively. However, the producers only had a small number of animals processed locally for direct sale. The largest producer processes approximately 100 animals annually for local sale through a custom processor, whereas the other two had three to eight head processed, depending on individual customer demand. The two smallest producers used the same state equal-to facility outside the region.

Each interviewee was very supportive of the project and would use the facility, even though all were very satisfied with their current processor (other than the issue of capacity). Each noted their current processor could not take on any additional animals, and the state-inspected site was scheduling 18 months out.

Methods

Extension sent the survey via multiple channels. To start, Extension obtained lists of livestock producers in Central Minnesota through the Minnesota Forage Council. In early June 2022, Extension sent an email invite to 118 producers in the region. The response rate, however, was low. Therefore, Extension partnered with Minnesota Farmers Union to mail paper surveys, along with a \$2 incentive, to the Minnesota Forage Council's master list. Extension then pulled 200 names to sample.

The survey garnered responses from across Central Minnesota (Map 1). Crow Wing (22) and Cass (10) Counties had the most responses.

Map 1: Counties of Survey Respondents, Livestock Producers in Central Minnesota



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