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NEWS RELEASE**Larry's Custom Meats expands capacity for farm-raised meat in Central NY**
Project expected to return \$4.25 million annually to farmers

Moving across the road has been a big journey for Larry Althiser, who recently re-opened Larry's Custom Meats in Hartwick.

The new slaughterhouse, now located at 3487 State Route 205, is USDA-certified, which means the meat processed on site can be packaged for re-sale, a critical requirement for farmers who sell their goods via farmers markets, grocery stores, restaurants, and the like.

"We outgrew our old facility," Althiser said. "Customers asked us about getting the USDA certification. Most of the customers grow animals to sell to others, especially at farmers markets. Other plants were booked so far ahead, farmers couldn't get in."

Chris Harmon, Executive Director of the Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE), said, "There is a lack of slaughterhouses in the area. They are a necessary piece of infrastructure that can help farmers fulfill their destiny."

CADE, a nonprofit dedicated to agricultural economic development projects, provided Larry's Custom Meats with technical assistance in business planning, securing loan funding, plant design, visiting similar plants, food safety planning, working with USDA inspectors, and more.

With the new 6,000 square-foot facility, Larry's Custom Meats can process up to 5,000 animals per year, up from 1,100 animals in the old plant. Larry's Custom Meats employs eight people, and expects to add seven more employees.

Althiser founded Larry's Custom Meats in 2002. He has more than 30 years experience working in slaughterhouses and as a butcher.

"Custom means you get what you want," Althiser said of his business. "We keep track of each person's animal, and you take home what you brought in. The most important thing is being honest and taking care of customers."

Larry's Custom Meats has received calls from farmers around the state interested in booking appointments, and has more than 30 farmers on a waiting list, even before the USDA-certified plant was open for business.

"I didn't realize the impact would be this big," Althiser said.

Althiser invested \$800,000 into the new facility, which boasts efficient animal processing, electronic records and data management services, and an energy- efficient building. The project was made possible by a collaborative effort of local economic development partners as well as state and federal agencies interested in developing necessary infrastructure. The increased capacity enables regional farmers to grow their businesses to meet the demand for local food.

Most of the farms that use Larry's Custom Meats send two or three animals per year, but Harmon predicted some larger farms, including dairy farms looking for alternative markets for their cows, will use the slaughterhouse. The annual return to farmers is estimated at \$4.25 million in meat sales.

"I hate to see farmland go to waste. I hate to see upstate New York lose agriculture," said Ulla Kjarval, whose family raises grassfed beef, pork, and lamb at Spring Lake Farm in Delhi. She recently joined the board of directors of CADE.

"I was excited to learn how much CADE was doing to help farmers be more profitable," she said. "A primary reason why farms go out is they can't make a profit."

In the past, Spring Lake Farm waited more than six months for a slaughter date for their pigs. It's an obstacle many farms in New York State are familiar with, the inability to get their animals processed in time to market them.

"The problem stems from a lack of small to mid-size slaughter facilities, particularly those that are USDA-certified and can package meat for third-party resale. Perhaps more important is the seasonality of the livestock business. Because so many farmers raise their animals for fall harvest, small slaughterhouses are deluged with business in the fall, but may experience lulls in activity at other times in the year," stated Nicole Day, CADE's Director of Programming and Communications.

"Consumers want to eat throughout the year, not just in the fall," Harmon said. "In some communities there is enough meat processing capacity, but there are a lot of seasonal bottlenecks."

CADE will encourage farmers to space slaughter throughout the year, to alleviate the pressure on meat processing facilities, as well as sell meat at different times of the year.

And, CADE will continue working with Larry's Custom Meats to ease the transition in the new facility, and to improve marketing.

Althiser said the slaughterhouse will one day feature a retail store for local customers, stocked with hamburger, steaks, bacon, hot dogs, and more.

Grant funds from the NY Farm Viability Institute and the Appalachian Regional Commission allow CADE to work with slaughterhouses to increase capacity. In addition to Larry's Custom Meats, CADE is working with three small meat processing facilities in Central New York.

The model used in Central New York could be replicated outside the region to address slaughterhouse capacity, Harmon said.

On the Internet: www.cadefarms.org

On Facebook: CADE Farms

On Twitter: @CADEFarms

For videos of Larry's Custom Meats new USDA slaughterhouse, please go to the following website links:

PART ONE: <http://foodcurated.com/2011/04/cade-part-1-building-artisan-slaughterhouses-in-upstate-new-york-to-feed-the-demand-for-grass-fed-meat/>

PART TWO: <http://foodcurated.com/2011/04/cade-part-2-the-good-slaughter-a-proud-meat-cutter-shares-his-processing-floor/>

PART THREE: <http://foodcurated.com/2011/04/amuse-bouche-larry-the-meat-cutter-walks-me-through-a-side-of-beef-in-one-take/>

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