

The Changing Face of Meat Science Extension

Joseph C. Cordray

While the mission of Meat Science Extension, *to provide knowledge and connections for people interested in meat science to achieve their personal and professional goals*, has not changed, the way we fulfill that mission has changed significantly and continues to change with an ever increasing rate of speed. After all, one of the constants in life is *change*. In the past 30 years we have seen significant changes in Meat Science Extension's clientele, program content, program delivery, program funding, program needs and publication format. In some cases we have also seen a change in Meat Science Extension personnel position responsibility statements.

CLIENTELE

Traditionally the focus of Meat Science Extension's client base has been; livestock producer groups, farmers, small custom plants and consumers. Today that client base has expanded to include retail establishments and official plants of all sizes involved in animal harvest and/or production of processed meat products. There is also an increased interest from retail establishments, chefs and research chefs who wish to produce specialty meat products for their customers.

PROGRAM CONTENT

In the past Meat Science Extension programs often focused on harvest, carcass quality, carcass yield and carcass fabrication. In recent years program content has been expanded to include food safety, regulatory compliance, production of processed meats, marketing and distribution, business sustainability and business succession. In 1997 with the passage of the Pathogen Reduction Act, regulatory compliance became a major focus of Meat Science Extension program content. The Pathogen Reduction Act contained regulatory requirements for writ-

ten Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs) and written Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points Plans (HACCP). Both regulations required extensive training of meat industry personnel. Since 1997 many HACCP training programs have been held across the country for meat plant personnel. HACCP training programs continue today on a regular basis for new employees entering the meat industry and as refresher courses for previously trained individuals. Food Defense Plans and Recall Plans are two regulatory issues that have developed since the implementation of HACCP. One of the most recent regulatory changes is increased requirements for Validation and Verification. The regulatory requirements for meat plants is significant for plants of all sizes; however, perhaps the plants that are most affected are the small and medium sized plant which often have fewer technically trained personnel than large plants. Also, it is not unusual for smaller plants to produce a larger diversity of products than large plants. In recent years there has been an increased interest in producing more Ready-to-Eat processed meat products and shelf stable products. This has resulted in increased Meat Science Extension programs in these two areas. A growing number of meat processors have also become involved with being certified by one of the Global Foods Safety Initiative's approved schemes. Many Meat Science Extension specialists have developed programs in areas outside of meat science addressing topics such as packaging, marketing, distribution, business sustainability, employee management and business succession. After all it takes more than the ability to manufacture a good product for a business to be successful.

PROGRAM DELIVERY

Traditional Meat Science Extension program delivery has been face-to-face (either in groups or one-on-one) or through written materials. Today there are many additional options for program delivery including; webinars, conference calls, eXtension and Skype calls. eXtension is an Internet-based collaborative environment where Land Grant University content providers exchange knowledge to solve challenges in real time. Due to time and cost constraints one-on-one program delivery where an extension meat specialist goes to a plant and works individually programs on location with a plant is almost a thing of the

Joseph C. Cordray, Ph.D.
 Extension Meat Scientist
 Iowa State University
 194 Meat Laboratory
 Ames, IA 50011-3150
 jcordray@iastate.edu

past. Group face-to-face programs or online allow extension meat specialists to work with several processors at the same time.

PROGRAM FUNDING

In the past there was often adequate federal and state funds available for programs to be delivered at no charge. Currently, due to cut backs in federal and state funding, institutions often require cost recovery be sufficient to cover the cost of extension programs. Some institutions also want extension specialists to charge a cost recovery fee for working with clients one-on-one. Frequently extension meat specialists obtain grants for specific types of programming, such as HACCP courses, in order to offer the programming at reduced rates or at no charge. Typically livestock commodity groups are very willing to help with the cost of programming they request. By using good planning and careful use of resource materials, it is possible to offer exceptional extension programming for a fee that most clients feel is reasonable. However, there is still some resistance from long time extension clients to pay for extension programs because they are used to receiving extension information for free.

EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS

Meat Science Extension publications have traditionally been print form only. However, extension is moving away from print form only and toward digital formats such as web pages, blogs, podcasts, YouTube and Facebook. For many people the Internet has become an important source of information. Many extension publication distribution centers lack the space or financial resources to maintain all of their publications in print. Electronic publications can often be distributed free or at a greatly reduced cost compared to print versions. Also, having electronic publications prevents the publication from becoming out of print.

FUTURE OF MEAT SCIENCE EXTENSION

In the future there is going to be a strong demand for Meat Science Extension. Consumer's demand for high quality, convenient and safe meat products coupled with the need to comply with complex regulations are creating an ever increasing need for Meat Science Extension. In order to grow and prosper in the future I feel extension meat specialists should keep the following in mind.

- To make maximum use of time and resources concentrate on group presentations either face-to-face or online. Use distance education when feasible
- Incorporate digital formats into your program delivery
- Partner with other meat extension specialists in development and delivery of resource materials
- Develop guidelines for charging for your programs or services so you can work toward making your programs self-supporting
- Actively seek grants to support your programs
- Develop tools to document the impact of your programs
- When appropriate convert existing extension print materials to electronic format
- When appropriate utilize resources developed by other extension specialists
- Never forget the mission of Meat Science Extension; *to provide knowledge and connections for people interested in Meat Science to achieve their personal and professional goals*