

Lamb Roast and Slaughter

As a new sheep producer in the Farmington area I have discovered that finding marketing options for lamb slaughter and sales have been difficult due to Federal regulations and slaughter facilities limitations. However, the Peace River region is very fortunate to have a convenient, low impact, low stress option brought into the area, "Gate to Plate Services Ltd.". This high-technology mobile slaughter unit provides humane, custom, on-site slaughter services to producers and processors. Stress and physical trauma suffered by animal transport is removed thus improving the quality of meat and extending the shelf life of the final product. The design of the mobile slaughter unit allows for products to be certified as organic, halal, kosher, biodynamic, and humane. This service also lowers costs in production due to transportation costs, and may help lower the costs of specialty products, making the producers production more economically viable.

Out of curiosity, I contacted Lars Jorgensen, of Gate to Plate services to inquire about how to get the mobile unit to come to my farm. As a result, I discovered that I would need to have a full days worth of animals to process which was approximately 40 lambs. Because I do not produce this number of animals as of yet, I decided to ask other producers if they were interested in trying this new service and bringing their stock to my farm for slaughter. As a result, I decided to host a lamb slaughter demonstration and tie it into our farms second annual lamb roast.

Awareness of the mobile slaughter facility is present in the Peace River region, but smaller producers have been sceptical to utilize the facility due to the lack of knowledge on how the process would work for their farm. There is also a concern with smaller producers that they do not have the number of animals that the Gate to Plate requires. The objections for the demonstration was to show local producers that there are alternative options available for marketing government inspected meat through the mobile slaughtering facility and to increase awareness about the Gate to Plate Services. Also, demonstration of desired carcass quality and generating discussions around finishing options surrounding lamb. And thirdly, to taste lamb prepared in a few different ways.

To answer the first set of questions surrounding the Gate to Plate services, How do I get the services on my farm? What do I need to do to prepare and what kind of handling facilities do I need? And, What do my animals need to weigh?

1. Contact Lars Jorgensen of Gate to Plate services to receive the appropriate paper work which includes Farm name, address, how you are going to dispose of the solid waste matter (a hole dug at least 200 m from water ways is ideal), and a hand drawn map of your farm and where the slaughtering will take place and the size of the pens. The office number in Fort St. John is (250)785-7738.
2. To prepare you will need enough animals to make a full day for the Gate to Plate Services, approximately 40 animals. You will need a pen that is large enough to handle 40 animals but can be broken down into smaller pens. The idea is the 3 lambs will be processed at the same time. The smaller the pens the better as the lambs tend to get excited and as we learned, will clear a 6 foot page wire fence if given a run and a couple of hops allowance. The best

system would be holding pens that hold 10 animals at a time tightly, yet comfortably and then allow the animals to be funnelled into a squeeze situation. The lambs should not be able to climb out and the fences should be strong enough to handle a bit of animal impact. I would also suggest that for your first time, you have extra hands and help to ensure you can handle the unexpected. (Yes, it all happened to us). You also need a tractor bucket or some sort of plastic container to transport the solid waste materials to your designated dumping area. The tractor bucket worked really well for us, but if you do not have a tractor, other forms of transport could be used as well. The hole that the Federal inspector requires must have at least 3 feet of soil to cover the waste once it is in the ground. We dug a 6 foot hole with the tractor and this was more than enough to handle 30 lambs. Prior to your slaughter date, Lars Jorgensen and the Federal Inspector in your area will come out to your farm to do an inspection and to sign off on the paper work. This is quick and painless and may also give you time to spruce up your facilities if need be.

3. Ideally, the animals should weight between 110-120 pounds on the hoof to ensure a carcass weight of at least 50 pounds. This ensures that you, the producer, and Gate to Plate generate ample profits. This also makes up for the smaller animals that you may have due to lambing timing and multiples that do not tend to grow quite as quickly as singles or earlier lambs.

From a producer's point of view, this event was a success. There were some stresses throughout the day with a quick modification of the handling facilities, and a chase of escaping lambs, but all in all it was a success. If I were asked if I would do this again my answer would be, Yes, with some corral modifications of course. There were 26 producers in attendance which was lower than was expected, however, those who did attend have already begun to pass the word and I have been approached by three separate producers since the demonstration to ask questions, and that was the main goal of the event.

Another highlight from the event was getting smaller producers together to communicate about what each other is doing and what each other are producing. There are many small sheep producers in the Peace River area that would be interested in participating in a group slaughter day when there are enough animals to be slaughtered. I have since offered for smaller producers to contact me with their expected slaughter dates and numbers so that I might help producers get together to use the Gate to Plate Services.

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