



Byron Center Meats

Byron Center Meats, a family-owned, federally-inspected processing facility, has provided quality meats for 72 years. They offer a full-service butcher shop and grocery store, a food service division, home delivery through HarvestBox.com, and custom meat processing for livestock. Now with the creation of Byron Center Meats Custom Butchering, they can add mobile harvesting to their offering of services for local livestock producers.

Owners Steve and Laura Sytsma weren't necessarily looking to expand into the mobile slaughtering business, but the opportunity came to them through an informal conversation at their son's graduation party in Sioux Center, Iowa, in May 2017. After learning that Steve was a third-generation butcher, someone at the party suggested they meet his neighbor who was selling his mobile slaughter unit. They stepped outside on the porch right then and made a phone call to make the introduction. In June 2017, Steve and Laura traveled to Lynden, Washington, to tour and test drive the truck which is a 38' semi and trailer with a rail system for hanging carcasses, a skinning room, chill cooler, mechanical room and inspector's office. A month after that, the truck was purchased and on the way back to Michigan. Their goal was to apply for and receive their federal grant of inspection with the USDA in 2018.

While federally-inspected mobile slaughter trucks have been used for years in states including Washington, Oregon and California, there wasn't one east of the Mississippi River, and the Sytsmas knew that applying for a federal grant of inspection would have challenges. They reached out to Jeannine Schweihofer, Ph.D., MSU Meat Quality Extension Educator, and Tina Conklin, Director of Accelerated Growth Services, MSU Product Center, to help them facilitate the process.

At Jeannine and Tina's suggestion, they applied for and were awarded a Value Added Grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. These grant funds allowed the Sytsmas to equip the mobile slaughter unit with the necessary harvesting equipment and employee training to meet USDA regulations. After a year of intense planning, preparing, and training, they harvested their first six beef under federal inspection on September 13, 2018. They will harvest under USDA-inspection one day a week and increase harvesting days to meet customer demand.

Giving Michigan livestock producers access to this innovative harvesting option fills a void of USDA-inspected on-farm slaughtering. Animals slaughtered under USDA inspection opens the door for Michigan livestock producers to sell locally raised meats direct to consumers at on-farm stores, farmers markets, direct to restaurants with farm-to-table meats on their menus and other retailers. Byron Center Meats will continue to offer the "Custom Exempt" harvest status for private home freezer use.



Owners Steve and Laura Sytsma

"The combined experience from MSU Extension and the MSU Product Center in working with federally-inspected plants, extensive knowledge of food safety regulations, and professional connections within the agriculture industry were critical in developing our action plan," states owner Laura Sytsma.

"It has been an absolute privilege to have had the opportunity to work with this business, these people, and to play a small part in bringing the first mobile slaughter unit that is federally inspected to the great state of Michigan. As a business, they have provided their customers with high quality products for 70 years, and with the addition of the federally inspected mobile slaughter unit, they are poised to continue for another 70. I really can't say enough good things about them – they are a pleasure to work with."

Tina Conklin

Director of Accelerated Growth Services, MSU Product Center

