THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
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Selling meat from your farm

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—More and more Ohio livestock producers are selling their meat directly to consumers through farmers markets or online.

That's because consumers are increasingly valuing locally produced food and having a relationship with the farmer who raised it.

And the profit margin for farmers can certainly be higher than selling livestock to a company that processes and packages it for grocery stores.

But direct marketing of any product comes with challenges.

(Photo: Getty Images)

"Figuring out what consumers want is important," said Garth Ruff, beef cattle field specialist with Ohio State University Extension, the outreach arm of The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES).

Bacon or bratwurst? Lamb chops or leg of lamb? Ground beef or pot roast?

Knowing what type of meat to offer also depends on who the most likely buyers are and what they're willing to pay. Will more buyers want grass-fed or grain-fed beef? Do they want chicken breasts individually wrapped or in packages of three or four?

There's a lot to consider. Ruff will share his advice to livestock producers wanting to sell their meat and better manage their beef herd during the 59th annual Farm Science Review from Sept. 22–24 at fsr.osu.edu. Ruff's talk, "Direct to Consumer Meat Sales," will be Sept. 22 at noon, and another talk on a related topic, "Beef Cattle Management: Maximizing Herd Potential," will be Sept. 23 at 10 a.m.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, this year's Farm Science Review will be exclusively virtual, so you can find out about the latest in farm technology and techniques in the convenience of your home. Or

on your tractor. Or combine. The show, which is sponsored by CFAES, is free. Sign up at fsr.osu.edu.

Ruff is among a series of speakers to address topics relevant to the agriculture industry, from controlling weeds and managing beef cattle to reducing safety hazards on the farm and growing plants indoors in water, without soil.

There's been a rising demand for value-added meat products, those that have at least one step of further preparation such as selling chicken as kebabs or creating sausage from ground turkey.

"There's a lot of opportunity with sausage and ground beef right now," Ruff said, citing higher demand for both.

Before livestock producers can sell their meat at farmers markets, they will need a warehouse license from the Ohio Department of Agriculture that regulates how the meat is stored and preserved, Ruff said.

"They can't store the meat in their home," Ruff said. "It has to be in a garage or building with refrigeration, and the area needs to be clean."

Also, producers might need a permit from the county health department where the farmers market is located. Some require a permit to ensure the meat is transported and stored in a way that's safe for consumers, Ruff said.

One important hurdle livestock producers will need to overcome to sell meat directly to consumers is finding a meat processor to harvest and package the meat. In spring, the coronavirus pandemic triggered a temporary shutdown at the nation's major meat processing plants because employees at plants were infected with COVID-19.

And meat packing plants nationwide continue to see spikes in COVID-19 infections.

While many of those processing plants reopened, a backlog of unprocessed livestock continues. And livestock producers cannot harvest their own livestock to sell to others.

"If you've established those relationships with the local processors and have a customer base, this could be a good time to get into producing your own meat," Ruff said.

For more information, visit fsr.osu.edu.

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