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Abattoir Final Report Identifies Critical Need to Support South Island Farmers

(Victoria, B.C.) The meat-processing industry in the Capital Regional District is heavily impacted by rising land costs, small margins, ALR regulations and bureaucracy. The result is the region lacks enough abattoir capacity to process and meet the demand for locally raised meat unless Lower Mainland services are used. Legal abattoirs in B.C. dropped from 300 in 2003 to just 11 in 2004 due to changes in B.C. government regulations in 2004.

These are some of the findings of the *Abattoir Feasibility Study for the Capital Regional District of British Columbia* final report, prepared by [Greenchain Consulting](#) for [South Island Prosperity Partnership](#) (SIPP). The report makes recommendations to improve local supply chains, reduce stress on animals caused by transporting them to the mainland, create efficiency in meat processing and decrease local farmers' costs.

"We need to support farmers to provide a better, ethically sourced, local meat product to the community at a competitive price," says Emilie de Rosenroll, CEO of South Island Prosperity Partnership. "This is vital to our region's food security and agricultural economy."

"The release of this study represents a significant milestone for the South Island and complements the ongoing and important Saanich Peninsula focus on agriculture," says Geoff Orr, Mayor, District of North Saanich. "Not only does the study highlight the now-critical lack of local meat processing facilities, but it also underscores the need for advocacy and investment to ensure food security and long-term resilience for the farmers who are so important to our region."

Funded in part by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the BC government through programs delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, the report makes the following recommendations:

- establish a multi-stakeholder working group to identify key barriers to local meat production and develop strategies to overcome those barriers
- create a local meat processing and distribution hub with the collaborative, cost-sharing aspects of a traditional food hub, potentially with value-added services such as cut and wrap, smoking and drying
- build a new poultry abattoir in the CRD that enables small-scale poultry producers to have their own poultry slaughtered and processed for their own consumption or retail sale.

“Since the onset of COVID, Vancouver Island residents have risen to support local producers — but to maintain and grow local food sales, it is essential we invest in infrastructure for food production, processing and distribution,” says Darren Stott, principal of Greenchain Consulting.

The report provides further detail into high-level strategies, including financial projections and operational considerations for a new poultry abattoir for the region. As the region’s economic development organization, SIPP will continue to support the initiative and is seeking stakeholders in the region who are interested in developing and improving the infrastructure.

To view the full report, visit:

<https://southislandprosperity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SIPP-ABATTOIR-REPORT-FINAL.pdf>

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For further information or to arrange interviews, please contact:

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Highlights of the *Abattoir Feasibility Study for the Capital Regional District of British Columbia: Final Report*

- **Abattoir capacity is lacking for small-scale poultry producers** — Both poultry processing facilities on southern Vancouver Island are focused on processing their own poultry. As a result, they are restricting or cutting back on processing chickens for third parties.
- **Demand for locally produced meat is strong and growing** — Even with a general decline of meat consumption due to COVID 19 and a gradual increase in vegetarianism, CRD consumers are buying more locally produced meat. Most local butchers and retailers report that sales were growing pre-COVID and have been particularly strong during COVID to the point they are struggling to keep up with demand.
- **A large market opportunity exists, but price is a key barrier** — While sales are strong for locally produced meats, they still represent a small percentage of overall meat consumption in the CRD. A key reason is the price is much higher than imported meats. It appears consumers are simply not sufficiently aware or do not care enough about the benefits of buying local meat (e.g. supporting the local economy, creating local jobs, avoiding meats injected with hormones) to pay a big premium.
- **A wide range of butchers, retailers and restaurants offer locally produced meats** — Consumers have a wide range of opportunities to buy locally produced meats in the CRD. With a population of just 419,000, the CRD has 12 butchers, 18 independent retailers and 24 restaurants that offer locally produced meats.

- **Meat sellers prefer a consistent supply of portioned meat** — Meat sellers report it is challenging to buy from local buyers when their supply is inconsistent and when they can only supply whole animals or block portions that are difficult to handle.
- **Custom cut and wrap services are lacking** — While sufficient abattoir facilities exist in the region, there are not enough cut and wrap services for local meat producers to get their carcasses cut into portion sizes.
- **High land costs are restricting growth** — Vancouver Island has had the greatest increase in farmland prices in B.C. Farmland currently sells for up to \$100,000 per acre, an increase of almost 25% over two years. The high cost is a barrier not only to new farmers but also to those wanting to expand their businesses.
- **Health and safety regulations imposed on the abattoir process have dramatically reduced farmers' options for processing meats locally.** — In many cases, live animals are moved out of the region (including shipped to the mainland) to be processed. This results in increased costs and increased stress to animals. Previous studies have revealed 50% less meat was being grown when the B.C. government altered the regulations in 2004. Despite the growth, legal B.C. abattoirs went from 300 in 2003 to just 11 in 2004.

Fast Facts

- The Greater Victoria region is home to many large- and small-scale livestock operations. Typically, the livestock is processed through the following stages — from abattoir to butcher, then retail sales, consumers, restaurants and institutional buyers.
- Many elements of this chain are in place today. However, with the onset of the pandemic, the demand for locally sourced meat and food security has become ever more critical as most local butchers cannot source enough local meats to satisfy the consumer demand.
- The mission of the South Island Prosperity Partnership ((SIPP) is to facilitate and promote the development of a strong, diversified economy on southern Vancouver Island. SIPP continues to support agriculture initiatives such as working with our partners to initiate a livestock roundtable/advisory group as well as supporting new opportunities to create and/or expand abattoir facilities and value-added services.
- The *Abattoir Feasibility Study for the Capital Regional District of British Columbia: Final Report* addresses a key pillar in SIPP's Rising Economy Taskforce's report [Reboot: Greater Victoria's Economic Recovery Plan](#).
- The *Reboot* plan's "Strengthen Local" pillar focuses on recommendations around our local economy, including agriculture initiatives. It recommends: enhancing existing "buy local" programs, organizing collaboration around suppliers, building resilience from pooled resources, increasing funds available to programs that shift consumer behaviours away from multinational giants and working towards improved food security for the region.