## Calving Distribution and Herd Health

## Season 1, Episode 22

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**Adele Harty:** Welcome back to another episode of Cattle HQ. I am Adele Harty SDSU Extension Cow/Calf Field Specialist based out of Rapid City, and I will provide introductions today for our guests on direct marketing. Today we've got three guests with us, and I will go ahead and let each of them introduce themselves, starting with Jaelyn.

**Jaelyn Quintana**: Thanks Adele. I'm Jaelyn Quintana, the probably oddball out here on the cattle HQ podcast as the Sheep Field Specialist but have a passion for direct marketing. Came from a background of direct marketing with my family both lamb and beef so really excited to be on today to talk direct marketing.

**Adele Harty:** Thanks Jaelyn, and Christina.

**Christina Bakker:** Hi, I’m Christina Bakker, I am an Extension Specialist in Meat Science at SDSU and also an Assistant Professor. My main areas of focus are meat science, so I work with the small processors throughout the State, as well as any producers who have questions about meat processing or anything like that. I kind of play in all of those different types of sand boxes.

**Adele Harty:** All right, thank you and Heather.

**Heather Maude:** Hello, my name is Heather Maude. My husband and I own and operate Maude hog and cattle in western South Dakota. We raise small grain crops, cattle, background some cattle, but in addition to that, we have a direct to consumer meat business through which we market beef and pork, both as retail cuts and then as larger quantities.

**Adele Harty:** Alright, thank you. So we've got a lot of information to cover today but we're going to do things just a little bit differently. I'm actually going to have Jaelyn host this session because of her work with Christina in some other direct marketing programming and we'll just have a great conversation. So with that Jaelyn, I'll turn it over to you.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Thanks Adele, so I think I'm going to start with you, Dr. Bakker on asking, so why have we seen this increase in interest in direct marketing and I guess to follow up with that what are some of the benefits of producers, direct marketing, as opposed to going into more of a commodity market?

**Christina Bakker:** Yeah so we have seen a huge increase in the interest in the direct marketing mainly recently because of the supply chain disruption from COVID-19. You know producers are kind of getting sick of having to take the market prices, and you know play by the rules of the larger packers and stuff like that. So they just kind of want to have a little bit more control over their own commodity.

And then also there's been a huge local foods movement, I mean that's not new, just in the last couple years, you know we've been trending that way. So people really want to understand where their food is coming from, they don't want to pick it up at the grocery store. They want to see the face of the person that's processing it. And then also one of the things from the pandemic is that people are enjoying and want to cook more at home. So, having those protein options available to them, has become pretty important to them. I mean there's a lot of different benefits to this, you can you know, improve your local economy by keeping your dollars local. And you know by having that relationship with whoever's producing your meat, those who are not in involved in agriculture can kind of get back to seeing what agriculture really is, and not just having to follow what they see on TV.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely I think those are really good points that talk about how direct marketing is not only beneficial for a producer but also for the bigger picture the larger community as well. So then Heather, why did you get started direct marketing?

**Heather Maude:** My husband actually began direct marketing, as a result of purchasing gilts to show in 4-H and he had a few that he sold pigs out of as a kid and then someone in the Black Hills area who did this, opted to retire. His name was Ken Hanson and he called and asked my husband, when he was a teenager if you would be interested in taking over his hog clientele list. So he sold half and whole butcher hogs for about 10 years. Then we got married. I was formerly a freelance journalist and photographer and when you have small children, you quickly realize that phone interviews are somewhat a thing of the past, for a while, so we sat down and decided that perhaps we should look at expanding and dialing in a little bit more on our hogs at that time, and it has grown from there. Like so many people we'd always fed a few beef for ourselves and a few family friends. In the spring of 2018 we joined our local farmers market and added retail cuts, in addition to whole and half hogs. Our farmers market only had grass finished beef and they asked if we would be in a capacity to add grain finished beef to their market. So at that point we added the grain finished beef as retail cuts and also then at that point offered it as quarters, halves and wholes. It started a long time ago, it kind of held there at the whole and half hogs for a long time, but in the last four years, with the addition of retail cuts in the grain finished beef it's really grown exponentially, from that point.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah that's awesome. I think it's a really good story of how we can utilize a product that we don't know what to do with sometimes at the beginning and then make a profit off of it. So then you talked a little bit about how you do pork and beef. Do you do just kind of your traditional cuts or do you venture off into some of the more value added products?

**Heather Maude:** Sure. We try to offer a complete retail lineup of both beef and pork, with regard to both standard cuts and then, I have a pretty I guess what would be considered an extensive value added market. We offer five kinds of pork bacon, two kinds of beef bacon at this time. I have beef snack sticks, jerky, both smoked and fresh bratwursts, summer sausage, and then during the holiday season, we add in additional kind of sausage or specialty product that is specific to the holidays for people that want to try something new. So yeah we try to have, I should have counted them, but we have a couple dozen cuts available both on the beef side and the pork side. And one real advantage to working with someone like us locally, is that I work directly with my processor, so if there's something you can't find in the grocery store, a customer can come to me, asked me if I can get that and I usually can't get it for you tomorrow, but I can get it on my next load if it's something my processors willing to cut and 8-9 times out of 10 they're willing to cut it if it's something they know how to cut. So that's a real advantage and something that people absolutely love long term, is that they can not only source local beef and local pork, but they can also get it, in a sense, more custom cut to suit they or their family's needs.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah I think that's a great point and my family for sure, has realized that having that relationship with your packer is arguably more critical than anything else when it comes to direct marketing. So, Dr. Bakker I guess on that same kind of note what would you recommend to producers to kind of help them build and foster that relationship with their packer?

**Christina Bakker:** Well, I think, when it comes down to that you've got to be able to advocate for yourself but also have patience. You know your processor they're very overwhelmed right now. Anybody that you talk to, they're understaffed and overworked and you know they're trying as best as they can. So I always recommend a decent amount of grace when it comes to those communications, you know your processor more than likely doesn't need your business, so you know they can find business elsewhere, so making sure that you have those respectful relations. But then also being clear in your communication. So in the types of cuts that you want, you know some processors may not know how to cut certain cuts. But if you show them a picture, maybe they just know it by a different name, so you know thinking outside the box on those types of communications. Or they can always give me a call, and I can try to explain, or you know show videos or something like that. I've worked with processors before doing that type of a thing. Then I would say also, Heather has already mentioned, you know you might not be able to get your product right then and there, that exact day. Don't expect to walk in today and walk out tomorrow with product. You know it does take some time, you have to get on their schedules, so you know just some pre-planning also goes a really long ways when it comes to working with the processors.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah for sure, and I think you mentioning that they're understaffed and overworked and I think producers are having a hard time getting into some of these small packing plants, but can you elaborate a little bit on what you're seeing and some of the programming that you're doing and in the growth of these small processors?

**Christina Bakker:** Yeah there's quite a bit of focus on the small processors right now and there's a lot of different programs out there, both from the Extension side, as well as the government side, whether it be for grants or just any kind of general support. There's a large grant out there right now for universities to apply for to do additional training for meat processing because there's really not very many places that somebody can get trained to be a meat processor without just going straight in and being an apprentice, working right with boots on the ground, which is a great way to learn. I mean you can't learn this by reading a textbook. So yeah there's a lot of different programs out there and that's where I would just if somebody is interested in learning more about meat processing, I would encourage you to reach out to your local Extension Agent or Extension Specialist and they can get you pointed in the direction of some of those types of programs.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely and kind of I guess along those same lines when we talk about looking for a processor and wanting to sell direct market, can you kind of go through, I guess what the regulations are that we need to have as producers, what plants we need to be targeting and looking for specific inspection requirements, things like that?

**Christina Bakker:** Sure, so in order for meat to be sold and enter commerce, it needs to be inspected and passed, which means that it needs to be processed at a facility that's either state or federal inspected. There's 27 states that have a state meat inspection program. South Dakota is one of them. So if product is state inspected the catch with that the only real difference between state and federally inspected, is that the state product cannot go into other states. It has to be sold within the borders of that state that it was inspected in. If the product is processed at a USDA facility, it can go anywhere in the country, it could even be exported. And then we've also got a newer program that's coming in right now that's called the Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program and I believe the 10th or 11th state just joined in but South Dakota is also a Cooperative Interstate Shipment state where a state inspected facility can get special inspection in order to be able to sell that product across state lines. So basically, they have a State inspector but they're federally trained. So those are the different options. The thing that I want to stress is that you cannot go to a custom exempt butcher and do direct marketing if you're wanting to sell out of your freezer or anything like that. Custom exempt means that you're paying the processor to process the animal only, you're not paying anybody for the meat. So an animal that you own is being taken into the processor and you're getting that meat back. And there's different ways that you can do that. You can buy the animal from the producer a couple days before, and they can take it in for you, and then you go get it. I'm not saying that you can't do something like that, but you can't specifically sell that meat, so if it's stamped with a “Not for Sale”, and it has a name on it, that is not something that can enter commerce.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Perfect, thank you. I think that that clears things up a lot. And I guess sort of trending on that same line, Heather you mentioned that you sold into the farmers market. What kind of things do you have to make sure that you're doing to sell into a farmers market?

**Heather Maude:** Sure, so we worked with a number of butcher shops over the years. I currently work with a USDA level inspected plant out of Sheridan, Wyoming called Western Heritage Meats. That is where all of my product that I would sell as retail cuts is butchered, and that is why. I grew up in Wyoming and we previously worked with a different USDA plant and found the ease of not being constrained by state lines where we are close to a state line to be very nice. We do also work with what is currently a custom exempt plant that is seeking an increase in level of inspection, but that would be where our western South Dakota producers have the option to go for quarter, half, and whole beef and half and whole hogs. As Dr. Bakker said they're going to buy those prior to them entering the butcher shop. So we work with a couple of different levels of inspection, but everything that is sold as a retail cut or to a restaurant, etc. is USDA inspected in our case. And then something else just to further elaborate on what Dr. Bakker said was we get asked a lot, how do I do this, how do I get started, and I would point out that state level inspected shops don't necessarily have to work with you to sell retail. That's kind of their decision if it's something they want to pursue. I would not base your whole business model on the butcher shop that's an hour away until you've gone to physically speak with the owner of that shop to determine if it's something that they are interested in doing, because not all state level shops are interested in doing that. As Dr. Bakker said, they all have enough business, however they want to do it right now. So if you're looking to pursue this make sure you go visit with the butcher shop in the early stages of developing your direct to consumer model so that you know which ones are going to be a viable option for you to work with.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely, I think that's a great point. And do you guys sell retail through the butcher shop too? I know some butcher shops will actually buy your product and market it for you. That's sometimes an option for people that maybe don't have the cooler space or freezer space at home.

**Heather Maude:** Right. Yes, yes, we do. Western heritage meets currently offers our pork as retail cuts and then they work with a couple of other producers and offer beef there as retail cuts as well. We formerly had our pork offered as retail cuts at the Spearfish butcher shop which, without diving into the depths they’re custom exempt, but they had a retail exemption which allowed them to sell retail cuts within their shop exclusively so, without going down that entire rabbit hole we have been with a couple of butcher shops. We're currently with a USDA shop that offers our product as retail cuts, and it's a very nice option for people, as you said that want to get it out there. If it's a product that the butcher is seeking that's always a conversation worth having to see if that's, something that would work for them to offer your meat as part of their retail lineup.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely. I think that's a great point. So, as we talked about you know I kind of mentioned that that's an option if you don't have enough room or you don't have the cooler space. Dr. Bakker, can you kind of walk us through how much beef we should be expecting to put in our freezer from one animal because I think, even as producers sometimes we sit there and go well, I don't think I got all my meat back. I took a 1200 pound steer into the butcher and how much meat did I get back? So, can you kind of walk us through that conversion?

**Christina Bakker:** Yeah I would say that's probably the number one question that I get. Usually somebody who's not in the best mood will give me a call at about 8:02 in the morning and they'll just go on a rant about how they didn't get everything back from their butcher. And there are a ton of different things that affect how much meat that you're going to get back. Heifers and steers they have different dressing percentages. You're going to get a little bit more back with a steer than you would with a heifer. How much finish that animal had. You know if it was fatter. You don't want half an inch, three quarter of an inch of fat, on your steaks. So your butcher is going to trim some of that off. Dairy influence animals are going to have a lower dressing percentage because they've got longer legs and heavier heads. Those things don't come back to you in your freezer and you're glad that they don't. So I mean there's a ton of different things that make a difference for what you're going to be getting. But some just general rules of thumb, and I mean you know, this could be off by even 100 pounds just based on the animal that you bring in, but we can generally say that you're going to need about one cubic foot of freezer space per 35 to 40 pounds of meat. I had one figured out here. An average muscle steer with about a half an inch of fat that weighs 1200 pounds could get you about 490 pounds of boneless trimmed cuts and that's boneless okay. So that's not your seven bone roasts and your ribs and all of that stuff. Those are going to obviously increase your weights. So by that math, that one animal would need about 14 cubic feet of freezer space. But it also depends on how that product is wrapped. So if your ground beef is coming in bricks versus chubs, bricks are going to stack nicer and they're going to be able to fit more in there. If you have larger roasts you know or they're odd shaped they're not going to fit in your freezer as well, so I mean there's a lot of different things that are going to impact how much meat you're going to get and how much freezer space that you're going to need.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah I think as producers, sometimes we forget those things. Like how much their head and their rumen weighs and things like that. So I'm going to switch gears here a little bit I guess and kind of go over to that consumer side of things. Heather, you obviously have a really good consumer base, and you have worked really hard to establish that. What have you done to really strengthen consumer trust?

**Heather Maude:** Oh that's a good question. Our goal in doing this was to have the high quality product on the market and to back it with exceptional customer service. And we just try to come back to that, so I think one of the best ways to gain consumer trust is to identify what you're trying what your goals are for your business, so that you can continuously align your consumer to that. I am the face of the business. I am who they're going to visit with. It was my husband, obviously I married into this and then, when COVID hit we were selling so much meat that he might be selling the same product that I was selling, so we transitioned to that all being me as the face the business. So one thing people like, as I believe Dr. Bakker mentioned earlier, is they like to speak with the producer, I am the producer. I'm out helping my husband. We do farm and ranch full time and I show that on social media. I also had all of our social media up, so it is out there, what we're doing day in, day out. And then I am who is physically at our booth. We sell at a local farmers market one day a week on the retail side, and I am there and I'm available, then for them to conversate with to ask their questions of. If they have any issues with the butcher or pros or cons, I am who they contact and then I become that liaison between them. And every single time that you do that well, that is building your consumer trust, because they are going to go tell, I now have people this year I have about 50% of my people come back to me, and they are either doubling their order or they've sold it to a neighbor. So one of the best things is once you gain that trust they will go tell the people that trust them. And you can then begin to grow exponentially in that way, but that's a huge thing to us just to have that relationship with the consumer and to make it an exceptional experience. That's a rarity in today's world. I own a small business I know. Trying to do business right now is extremely challenging and I don't want that to be the case with us because that's what I would like, as a consumer, and so they very much respond to that so your values and ethics that you value, I would suggest you always try to incorporate those. That's what we've done and we found that to be very successful for us.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah I think those are all great things to keep in mind, and I think I heard it put really well one time that, even as producers we’re still consumers. So, at the end of the day, you know we really have to focus on our quality because we want to feed our consumers the same things that we would want to eat since we're consumers also. Dr. Bakker kind of along those same lines, what would be your recommendations to producers to make sure that they're ensuring that they're putting quality beef on the table.

**Christina Bakker:** Well, I mean, I think what it comes back to is being able to produce a product that you stand behind. Raising the animals the way that you believe that they should be raised. You know not taking let's say you've got an old cull cow that you're you think, oh I'm just going to be able to put this in, nobody will notice. Trust me people are going to notice, if you put a lower quality animal in and you try to sell it, you know with your younger beef or something like that. Just be honest with the product that you've got and like Heather said put out a product that you are going to stand behind. Because that is your reputation, you can fool somebody into buying a product once, they're not going to buy again and what you want is a repeat customer. So making sure that you're putting your best foot forward every time is huge.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely. So back to you Heather. A lot of I the think intimidation factor, maybe of direct marketing is just that extra step of having to market. It's not as simple as taking those calves, to the sale barn or going straight into a commodity market or straight to a feeder. I guess kind of how do you market and even if you can elaborate a little bit, I know you have a pretty good presence on social media that has seemed to be a huge marketing outlet for direct marketing. So how you market? What recommendations, do you have for producers in terms of social media?

**Heather Maude:** Okay, I think you need to fit your marketing to your strengths and weaknesses. The real value of direct to consumer marketing is that is it a source of cash flow for those of us that are pursuing it. So you need to turn it into something that generates that cash flow for you in a way that you can do. I have a media background, as I mentioned, a former journalist, former newspaper editor so calling people doesn't bother me. Getting online, being a presence online, stating things and having my name tied to it, that does not bother me. My husband wouldn't do that. So prior to me coming on board, he would call, he has no problem, speaking with people on the phone he has no problem, speaking with people in person, so at that time it was more you're either going to speak with him in person or on the phone and then word of mouth. And then I come along and have a little bit different approach to that. I like social media, I think you can reach a lot of people with it. If you're going to delve into the social media world, I think you need to find a platform that you're already somewhat comfortable with if possible. That you're going to be able to somewhat easily navigate the scope of the platform itself, as you learn what works best for your business. I have visited with some people that are really knowledgeable in social media over the years to kind of dial it in. I am told that Instagram is where the people like 45 and under go to source local businesses like when they come into an area. So we had a Facebook presence for probably like five or seven years and then we added Instagram. Those are the only two that we are on with our Maude hog and cattle platforms and then you need to try things and see what works, what people respond to. In our case, we share a very high percentage of what I share is what we do, day in and day out, sharing our lifestyle, sharing what we do, sharing what goes into this product that ultimately ends up on our consumers plate because that's what I like to do. I really love the life we live, and the reason that we do direct to consumer marketing in large part is so that I can be home with my children so that they are home with me on the place day in, day out and learning and being raised in the same way, my husband and I were. And my consumers now, you know that resonates with them. So you need to look into that to. Why are you doing this? People will resonate, they always say you need to tell your why, in addition to your what or what you're selling. So that's a fine line that you need to figure out. What's going to work best for you and it's ultimately you know tailor it to what fits for you and your lifestyle and what you're trying to do, because that's the goal here if you're doing this, is to fit this into your lifestyle to hopefully generate some additional income that you would have sought off-farm, off-ranch otherwise. So, you know, try it, it doesn't have to be social media. Right now social media is probably the most effective and efficient way. It doesn't have to be email newsletters are a big player right now. Phone calls still go a very long way, particularly if you're looking at you know say our parents’ generation and they all eat too. So you know you don't have to dial into social media but yeah it's very, very effective, and I would just say start with one platform get it down, figure out what gets the most likes and maybe trend that way a little bit and once you have that down try another one, if you want to you don't need to be on all of them, you just need to be really good. You need to dial it in with whichever one you choose to participate on. I hope that answered your question.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah, absolutely. I think reminding people that you don't have to be on 600 different platforms. Do whatever you're comfortable with and whatever works for you, because I think you know, direct marketing the nice thing is like you said it can be something that we put as much or as little effort into you can make it just kind of a side hustle or you can truly make it another enterprise and another aspect to your operation.

**Heather Maude:** Yeah and I guess, I should say ours has been both. It has been a side hustle for my husband for 10 to 12 years before it transitioned into something more full time, so it does not have to be huge to be a contributing factor to your operation either.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely and just making it flexible and I loved your point about saying that we need to tell our why we're doing it too. My family's very much the same way. It was wanting my step mom to stay on the farm and do those things, so I think that's a great point. Really what goes back to that transparency that our consumers are wanting is to remember that we're still real people to. What would you say is your biggest challenge to direct to consumer marketing?

**Heather Maude:** That's a good question too. My biggest challenge is, what do you do when you've reached your maximum capacity to run your business yourself? And that's where we find ourselves. That would be my biggest challenge today that has changed over time. We've maxed out my ability to do this by myself, so we are at the point of do we try to source employee or employees. At which point we then need to grow again in order to cover the costs affiliated with having employees or do we stop here in terms of our growth and do we focus on efficiency? And that's the route we have chosen to go. So right now, our biggest challenge is finding ways to increase our efficiency, so that we can continue to do this and that's somewhat broad but, you know, finding ways to maximize the number of head that we take to a butcher at one time. Working with our butcher to maximize those days, so we are going less often with more livestock. We added cold storage to our place this year so that we are no longer driving one hour to source our retail cuts every week that we sell. A few years ago when COVID hit, getting into my butcher shops was a challenge, a lot of those sold. I had relationships built and I had days up until two of them sold. That can be a very big challenge, is establishing, maintaining that relationship with your butcher and then working through those issues when they sell because they do sell. Some other challenges would be, it's going to take more time than you think it will take if you decide to scale it. Just like anything and working through that and I think a lot of people that do this are probably in my position, my children are five and seven now. We started selling retail cuts, the fall my daughter was born. So I've worked through all of this with starting with two under two and if you want to stop it at any point, you can, but if you decide to continue growing it which, if you've been in Ag in the last five years, if you find something that's generating even the slightest bit of profit, it’s pretty hard not to grow that component of your operation. And so finding the ways to do that in addition to continuing to farm full time, ranch full time, background calves, those kind of things that's been really challenging for us. Just how do we make that all work. And how do we encourage this component of our farm and ranch that is actually paying the bills during these challenging drought years in western South Dakota. So I know that I've gone over a few, but it changes for us. There's a lot of pros to offset those challenges, too, but those are some of the bigger challenges we've been faced with.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah I think those are all great. Dr. Bakker if a producer decides, I guess, I want to make this dive, I want to start direct marketing. How do they go about even finding an inspected plant here in South Dakota?

**Christina Bakker:** So there's a couple different resources. So first off if you're looking for a state inspected plant or maybe you have one in mind and you're wondering if they’re state inspected, South Dakota state inspection is housed under the South Dakota Animal Industry Board. So if you go to their website, which is aib.sd.gov, they actually have a link in there for meat inspection and you can pull up a list of all of the inspected plants in South Dakota. You can do the same thing on the USDA FSIS website. So FSIS is the food safety inspection service is the branch of the USDA that oversees inspection. If you get onto their website, you can find the same thing. There's a little bit more that you have to wade through. It's not going to be just a list that you've got right away. But you know what that's one of those things if you're having troubles, you know you can always give me a call or an email, and I can kind of walk you through or maybe just send you the link, so you don't have to wade through it all yourself.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah you're definitely a great resource. And is it through Animal Industry Board that producers find any other regulations that they might need to know on selling meat?

**Christina Bakker:** So that's a good place to start, I would recommend if you're planning on staying on the South Dakota inspected route, then yeah you can contact the Animal Industry Board and they can kind of get you started with those rules. If you're looking for the Federal, so state has to be equal to or can be more stringent than federal inspection, so there may be some rules that South Dakota has that federally you don't have. So I would say contact whichever organization you're you're looking towards working with and getting the rules directly from them because they're changing all the time.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely. So I think to kind of just start wrapping things up, I have a question for both of you, and I guess maybe Heather you can start. For a producer that's wanting to get into direct marketing, what would be your biggest recommendation?

**Heather Maude:** I would suggest writing down what you're hoping to accomplish through direct marketing. And how you think you're going to make that work and then I think you need to speak with a butcher shop that you plan to work with. You need to show up at five o'clock in the evening and you need to sit down with them and have a conversation about how they see this working, because they're an integral part of making it work and they will have ideas for you, you may not have had. So I would say, those are the first two things. Figure out what you want to do, and why. Maybe figure out where you're going to source your livestock. How you're going to feed them and finish them just nail some of those things down how that's going to fit into what you're already doing, and then you need to go visit with the next step, and you can't have meat without a butcher.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah I think that's a great point and I guess I'll ask a follow up question to that. When you started looking at some of those value added products, how much time did it take for you to really develop that exact product that you wanted with your butcher?

**Heather Maude:** I have been with my current USDA butcher for about 14 months. And I believe by next summer, we will have it completely dialed in. That's not to say that we don't have a nice retail lineup of specially products at this time. But we're still working on that and a really big point that I would make is when you're talking with your butcher, ask them what kind of specialty products they like to make. That's a really great way to end up with the highest quality specialty products that your butcher comes up with. If they love to make jerky you're going to end up with really nice jerky. If they love to make specialty sausages, you'll probably end up with really nice specialty sausages. So that's what we're working through. We have tried a lot of flavors of the things that we try. We're now dialing those back into the core ones. They have only been in business, since I want to say December of 2020, and so they worked through three gentlemen in their smokehouse and so that's part of the reason that we're going to be at two and a half years before we get this dialed in, is that we've worked with three different smokehouse guys on our specialty products. But yeah you need to realize it's going to take you some time. It's not that you aren't going to have products but it's going to take you a time to get to that perfect, I am thrilled with this, my customers absolutely love every single specialty product that I offer. Now, this year, I will say my bratwurst sales are probably 30 to 40% higher than last year and we can't keep them in so there's your other problem is that once you get that dialed in and you get it perfect your ability to scale won't be perfect to your consumers buying the way in which they choose to buy that product. So you need to be aware of that too. Like you're going to get it all dialed in, but it won't stay right there. So yeah I guess that's a long winded answer but it's going to take a couple years to get that perfected, in most cases you're going to have to have several conversations with your butcher. And you're going to get to eat some stuff that isn't great along the way, but you can get there, and again as as Dr. Bakker said earlier, they’re people. They work very hard and they're very busy right now, so if you want to be the person that they're striving to do all of this with, you need to make yourself a very valuable customer to them. If you want them to really work hard with you because specialty products are above and beyond just cutting and wrapping meat, so you need to really work on that relationship with your butcher and that's another key part to getting quality specialty products.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Now you made the exact thought that I was having too. Is direct marketing doesn't just happen overnight. Even on sometimes your retail cuts, I know we've found that there are certain cuts that for whatever reason, our consumer basis doesn't prefer, so even though you get so many beef cut a certain way, then you have to figure out what to do with some of those cuts and maybe next order not do some of those cuts that don't sell as well and so I think, keeping in mind to just give yourself some grace in figuring out what you're going to sell.

**Heather Maude:** Yeah, if you're going to go to scale a bit you probably don't need a lamb, a hog, or beef of your own for your own freezer that first year. You're going to have plenty of stuff for your family to consume, as you work through figuring out what your consumers are going to buy from you.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah and that's a good reminder too. Is just that try your product because sometimes you’re like, we have to get it all sold. Well yes, we want to make a profit but don't forget to try it yourself first to make sure that it's going to be good. So then, Dr. Bakker I guess I'll throw that question at you as well, what recommendations would you make to a producer wanting to get into direct to consumer marketing?

**Christina Bakker:** I think Heather did a really good job covering most of what I was thinking. One thing I would recommend is working with your Small Business Development Center and coming up with that business plan. Having it in writing because if you do get to the point where you need to scale up, you need to build cold storage on your place or something like that, having those business plans actually written out is going to be huge for you getting a loan or whatever you're trying to do, whether that be a loan or grant. Have those conversations with your inspectors. Know where you're going to do the storage. Don't assume that your butcher is going to allow you to keep it there. That's not a thing for most places. And then yeah, have your marketing plan kind of figured out. How do you plan on getting the word out there for this? And yeah just realizing that it takes time. Where's your customer base coming from? Is there a need? Where you're at, just because you want to do it and there's nobody around that does it, doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to have a customer base right off the bat. So just kind of asking yourself those hard questions before you really spend a lot of time diving in and investing into this. Really making sure that you've got a thought out business plan is going to be crucial. And then you know one thing that I'd add to the to the value added conversation, you know that's one of those things that I really like to do anytime I can get down to the meat lab and play with processed meats, that's a good day in my book. Just remember that sometimes just because you really like it, doesn't mean that that's the way that that product should be made. You know you are still trying to get to a larger number of people, so you know, sometimes you have to put your own pride aside on what you think is a great idea for a product if it's not going to sell, it's not going to sell. And then, sometimes you do need to sacrifice, you know, maybe Boston butts on pork aren't selling you know they're not moving but you're moving all of your brats. Put those Boston's into trim and make brats with them instead. You know you don't have to stick to your traditional cuts and stuff like that. You just got to figure out what's going to work for you and those processors, some of them will go to the processed meat conventions and stuff like that. Ask them what if they have something that's award winning because if it's an award winning product other people have also said that it's a good product. Have those conversations as well.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah all really good reminders and I guess I brought up the value added thing, because I think we're seeing it grow a lot when it comes to direct marketing. I know, even on the lamb side, my family does some processed lamb products. And so I guess to the producers just being creative I felt like this has been really successful for our business too. Is like Dr. Bakker said, make sure that somebody's going to like it, but don't be afraid to try new things too. I guess what is there anything that either of you would add, that maybe we missed or other recommendations or things that you would suggest/

**Heather Maude:** You know, to kind of expand on something that that Dr. Bakker said. There are lots of ways to do this. I know people that live very, very remotely that go to a larger town or city twice a month to ship meat. I know people that have a little glass top freezer that they've put their logo on the front of Convenience Stores that they stock every say every two weeks. We sell our retail meat at a local farmers market. You may have a small town grocery store that will pick yours up, but it certainly is not a one size fits all way to do it. As Dr. Bakker said, if you feel that there's a need or you're being asked to do this, you just think about what would work best for you and the geographical area that you are hoping to market within, so I would just really encourage you to look at all aspects and figure out what works for you. It works for us to drive 45 minutes to the second largest town of Rapid City one day a week, but a lot of people live in a lot more remote areas and do this very successfully also.

**Christina Bakker:** And I guess my final thoughts on it would be just to know that you're not alone, and you don't need to make it harder than it needs to be. You know other people have tried these different business models and stuff like that. People are successfully doing this. Don't believe that you're going to become competition with somebody else who's direct marketing, because if you're not in the same geographical area you're not direct competitors. And, most people are very willing to have conversations and give you tips, and you don't need to make the same mistakes that they did. If you just reach out and try to build those relationships. Find yourself a mentor. I think that's huge in this type of a business.

**Heather Maude:** And I would add, be nice to the other people that do this, you know and foster those relationships as well. Like we don't ship, so I've met some people over the course of being in this business, who do, and so, when I have someone call and ask me, can you ship beef to Arizona, I say no. But here's a gentleman in Montana, that does this, that ships, here's his name and number. I feel like that's a great way to support your fellow people in agriculture.

**Jaelyn Quintana:** Yeah absolutely and so thank you both for being here and for I guess being that advocate that's helping us to put high quality meat products on the table and plus being the face and that transparency that our consumers want, so thank you both for everything you do.

**Christina Bakker:** Thanks for having me.

**Heather Maude:** Yeah thanks for having me.

Adele Harty: So with that, I would like to thank you Jaelyn for hosting this session of Cattle HQ and for our guests Heather Maude and Dr. Christina Bakker from SDSU. You guys did a fabulous job. I learned a lot from this podcast myself, and I will add some information to the show notes for the podcast for links that producers can connect as well as. Additional resources that were talked about during the podcast so with that thanks for joining us and we will see you next time.

**[Music]**