

Esto Meat Processing: Making A Difference in North Florida

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Esto Meat Processing (EMP) is a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified meat processing plant located about ten (10) miles north of Bonifay, on Highway 79 in Northwest Florida near the Alabama border. The EMP plant began operation in December 2003 under the ownership of Mr. Marshall Masters. There are two fulltime and two part-time employees. One employee has about seven (7) years of experience in food processing. Since its opening, the management of EMP has kept up with the necessary USDA food safety training requirements for all employees. Employees have received food safety training that included Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), Food Safety Manager's Training, carcass evaluation and on preparation of various cuts of meat. An approved HACCP plan is in place at EMP and employees participate in annual updated training on current food safety practices that include food biosecurity and bioterrorism. Marshall Masters, Lonnie Good, and Greg and Cindy Masters have HACCP and Safe Staff certification. Cindy has Safe Staff Manager's certification and serves as the HACCP coordinator for the plant. The facility has meats available for retail and wholesale as well as emu oil and emu oil products. Also, custom processing and packaging are available at EMP and for more information please call 850-263-7777.

The number and types of animals processed at the EMP per week varies and are dependent on the availability of animals. The greatest number of animals processed during a single week is about fifty (50) and included goats, pigs, deer, buffalo and cattle. Also, ratite animals include emu, ostrich and rhea are processed at the EMP facility. The carcasses of the animals are processed into various cuts, weighed, vacuumed-packaged and labeled for market. There is no direct market outlet for any specific amount of meat and sales are dependent on local demand for the various cuts of meats. Various packaging (trays, plastic wrap etc.), labeling and display methods have been tried in marketing the products. Presently, there seems to be more demand for live goat but less for processed goat meat. There is need for development of market resources to assist small processors like EMP to reach more consumers in Florida.

Recent activities involving processing of twenty (20) goats showed that the present market price for live animals can result in increased price to consumers. Are consumers willing to pay the price for processed goat meat? Analysis of the costs of processing the meat from the goats includes animals, labor, packaging and offal disposal was performed with the necessary calculations to determine potential profitability for a processor. The results showed that the goats dressed out at 30% resulting in carcass weight of 318 pounds of goat meat. The costs of labor, packaging and offal disposal fee added an additional five hundred and sixty-five dollars (\$565.00) to the processing costs. The calculations showed that in order to breakeven, the processor would have to sell the meat at five dollars and forty-four cents per pound (\$5.44/lb) to consumers.

Mr. Master, owner of EMP has been working closely with Florida A & M University (FAMU) Cooperative Extension Program, County Agents in three counties, (Jackson, Calhoun and Holmes) and goat producers to increase the number of small farmers that are provided with information on herd health and management practices. This should result in improved management systems, enhanced production and increased in marketing of goat meat, efficiency, profitability and long-term survival of these farms.



Esto Meat Processing facility



Preparing goat hamburgers

EMP, FAMU Cooperative Extension Program and goat producers collaborated with County Agents in three counties, (Jackson, Calhoun and Bay) in participating in the 19 th Annual Goat Day at the Sam Atkins Park, sponsored by the Blountstown Rotary Club, Blountstown, Calhoun County, Saturday, October 16, 2004. Producers displayed animals that included breeds such as Boer, Tennessee fainting (Myotonic), Spanish, Nubian and mixed animals (crossbred) and conducted interactive sessions with children and other attendants. EMP displayed various cuts of goat meat using a refrigerator with a glass door. Some patrons received information and purchased various cuts of meats to prepare at home.

EMP and FAMU Cooperative Extension Program personnel have been collaborating on the development and marketing of various value-added products from goat meat. Four goat meat products (Curried goat, Goat Sausage, Goat Hamburger Mixed (goat, pork, emu), Curried goat burrito) were prepared and offered to patrons for sampling and for sale at the Goat Day in Blountstown, Calhoun County, Saturday, October 16, 2004. Free bite size samples of each product were offered to visitors to food the booth. The four products were evaluated by patrons on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest, based on taste, color and appearance, texture, how they like them and would they buy them. Most patrons preferred to sample three products and preferred the Curried goat, Goat Sausage, and Goat Hamburger Mixed (goat, pork, emu). Analysis of the data will determine which product was preferred the most and the criteria of the greatest acceptance among the patrons. The information that will be gained from evaluation of various value-added products will increase our understanding of how well people like these goat meat products and the degree of public acceptance of goat meat as an alternative food source.

EMP has been collaborating with the Agriculture Research Group (ARG), Alabama, (www.thearg.com) in the development of medical products containing emu oil from fats

produced by Florida Farmers. Since 1996, ARG has been involved in developing products for use in the treatment of non-healing or difficult healing wounds, skin disorders and arthritis pain. The research and development of these products included collaboration with pharmacologists and laboratories have led to the test-marketing in nursing homes, home health care applications, and through medical supply companies, as well as direct to households.



Labeled vacuum-packaged goat links



Labeling vacuum-packaged hamburger

Some of these products have been successfully used in surgeries and in the treatment of surgical wounds. Emu are processed at EMP, where the meat is packaged under USDA specifications for use as food. The fat from emu is harvested and prepared for shipment to USDA rendering facilities where it is processed for use in medical and skin care products. Recently, EMP and FAMU Cooperative Extension Program personnel had discussions with ARG on possible collaboration in the development of value-added products that are more healthful for consumers. ARG has expressed interest in the Goat Hamburger Mixed (goat, pork, emu) because it contains emu which is the chief red meat alternative source in hamburgers sold by the company. ARG is interested in the development and production of hamburgers and other products using goat meat to replace the traditional beef used in these hamburgers because of the nutritional benefits of goat meat. Nutritional information on goat meat was provided in an unpublished brochure entitled “Eating Healthy. Enjoy, Goat Meat: A Desirable Red Meat Alternative” (FAMU Cooperative Extension Program, 2004). The brochure contained various facts on goat meat, recipes and nutritional comparison of goat meat to other commercially available and exotic meats. Goat meat has lower cholesterol, saturated fat and total fat content when compared to the other meats. The concentrations of riboflavin, potassium, manganese, and copper in goat meat were higher than those in the other meats. This potential collaborative partnership may lead to the development of value-added products (goat sausages, hamburgers etc.) from goat meat and include various mixtures of emu meat added as another food source with superior nutritional composition that will provide potential health benefits for healthy and medically managed consumers.

Mr. Masters’ vision is to expand the EMP facility as the goat industry develops to include food safety projects and development of more value-added products for the consumers. Also, he would like to have some assistance in funding for building expansion and marketing research that will provide opportunities for student training and experiential learning.



Mr. Masters with an enthusiastic patron



A patron with a goat link sausage

Mr. Masters believes that development of proper marketing will not only encourage existing small farmers to increase production but will gain new farmers who will contribute to supplying the anticipated consumer demand resulting from increase diversification of the population, public awareness and acceptance of goat meat as an excellent alternative food source.



Preparing curried goat burritos



Curried goat stew

Mr. Masters intends to continue to assist FAMU Cooperative Extension Program in identifying existing and new farmers to participate in the herd health and management programs involving studies with small farmers in controlling intestinal parasites in goats. He believes that continuous improvement in animal health and management practices will enhance animal productivity and result in increased number of animals and quality of meat processed by EMP. This will lead to more and better quality goat meat available for the market, development of value-added products, better prices for goat meat and goat meat products and increased profitability for both small farmers and meat processors.

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