Rising Spring Meat Co. Rises to the Challenge

In the fall of 2011, long time SBDC clients Jay and Laura Young along with a business partners Mike and Virginia Byers, came to the SBDC with a vision to purchase a recently shuttered slaughterhouse. The Young’s and the Byer's each own successful and diverse agriculture related businesses and one aspect they both had in common was a need for a facility where they could bring their finished animals to slaughter.

It is common practice in rural areas for farmers to raise meat animals and to have the animals slaughtered at USDA inspected facilities in order for the meat to be resold under the individual farm brands. These farmers are dependent on small-scale local processing plants to kill, cut, wrap and freeze (KCWF) the meat to be supplied to their customers. The closing of Cooper Street Meats in Spring Mills, PA in January 2011 reduced the access for area farmers to USDA inspected facilities. The remaining USDA inspected facility is fully booked, often turning customers away. This directly impacts a farmer's ability to get product to market and as a result impacts the local economy.

In response to this situation, Young/Byers formed a subchapter S corporation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with the goal of acquiring the Cooper Street Meats facility and reopening it as a USDA inspected slaughterhouse. The founders shared a vision of improving access to value-added (KCWF) products via the implementation of a set of principles and practices that included traceability: reliable tracking of an animal that comes to the facility insuring that the meat the customer receives in return is entirely the same animal they brought to the facility.

The overall vision was to start the processing plan (KCWF) for local farmers then once that was open and operating add a USDA inspection day and then finally add the retail component. Each of those steps required careful planning, hiring of employees, marketing of their services and probably most importantly a way to fund the project. Originally the partners came to the SBDC looking for assistance in developing a business plan that could be pitched to investors. But as they worked with the SBDC, several commercial funding partners were identified and after helping to create numerous iterations of their pro formas, they successfully received funding from Northwest Bank, the Business on Banking program through the FHLB, the Centre County Industrial Development Authority and finally local investors, including the partners.

RSMC Milestones include:
Final notice of successfully navigating the funding maze: April 2012
Hired first employees May 2012
Opened doors for custom processing June 2012
USDA schedules weekly onsite inspections August 2012
Earned Organic Certification for processing meat March 2013
Opened retail shop in Spring Mills April 2013
Began selling at a satellite retail operation in State College May 2013

Now that their core revenue streams are solidified, they are taking some time to explore the feasibility of other markets they can tap into such as offering Halal and Kosher. Their retail shop also stocks other locally sourced value added food products that compliment what is selling out of the refrigerated cases. But no matter what direction they take, they know the SBDC is ready and willing to assist them in the future stages of this little business, which has already had a positive impact for local meat farmers, local vendors and of course all of their loyal customers.