

NORTHWEST COLORADO MEAT SECTOR

ROUTT, RIO BLANCO, MOFFAT COUNTIES

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Northwest Colorado, including Moffat, Routt, and Rio Blanco counties, is a stronghold for traditional ranching communities with over 700 livestock operations (Table 1). With multiple coal mines expected to shut down in the region, an economic crisis is possible for the ranching community in the area. With land prices and the cost of living on the rise, ranchers utilize the mine as another source of income.

The Northwest Colorado Development Council and the Community Agriculture Alliance worked together to apply for support from the Just Transition Fund to do a feasibility study for the producers in the region to calculate the inventory and demand for regionally sourced meat products in the region. The goal of the study is to be a singular resource that encompasses the different perspectives of producers,

Table 1. Number of livestock operations by county and species.

County	Beef		Sheep		Hog		Poultry	
	Operations	Inventory	Operations	Inventory	Operations	Inventory	Operations	Inventory
Moffat	172	23,172	31	54,647	35	507	16	144
Rio Blanco	122	16,792	25	7,859	1	15	4	6
Routt	232	15,831	30	12,518	10	24	23	489
TOTAL	526	55,795	86	75,025	46	546	43	639

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- Gain practical experience with data collection and application
- Practice statistics to increase the palatability of data collected
- Utilize science and business-related knowledge
- Practically apply knowledge from coursework to real-world scenarios
- Provide a complete study to be used by producers within the region

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This internship applies to both of my majors, Animal Science and Agriculture Business. I utilized my science background by incorporating meat science and livestock evaluation while encouraging the economics and business side of my education to make practical sense of the information. It also allowed me to explore possible career opportunities.

INTERN RESPONSIBILITIES

As an intern for the Northwest Colorado Meat Sector, I was largely in charge of the behind-the-scenes work with the feasibility study. As interviews with producers were largely conducted in the spring before the internship start date, I was responsible for sorting through the interview transcripts and extracting pertinent data. There were 39 interviews from producers in the 3 (Table 2). Out of those interviews, we collected qualitative and quantitative data related to their annual production, finishing weights, processors, and how they market and/or sell their meat products. This information was aggregated for the whole region and used to extrapolate estimates for total supply.

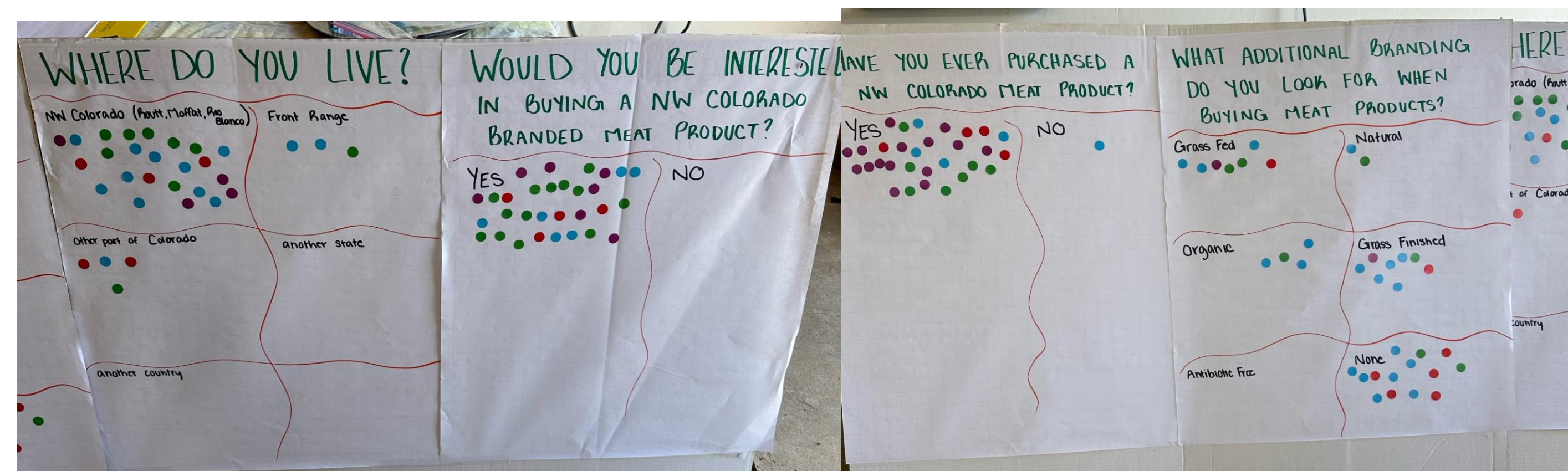
We also conducted a consumer dot survey to be conducted at the Farmer's Market in Steamboat Springs and at the Routt County Fair (Figure 1). This survey was meant to give us some consumer insight regarding locally raised and processed meat products.

Once all the data was collected, we began working on the feasibility study and outreach materials. I made a one-sheet summary of the study shared with community stakeholders including local elected officials and community partners. These resources were shared at events including the Routt County Fair, a rancher appreciation dinner, and the Moffat County Cattleman.

Table 2. Estimated population and interview sample of producers

County	# selling locally/regional	Interviewed	%
Moffat	15	7	47%
Rio Blanco	21	18	86%
Routt	26	13	50%
TOTAL	62	38	61%

Figure 1. Photo of the dot survey from the Routt County Fair



LEARNING OUTCOMES

Not only was I able to learn about the supply and demand structure of meat products from the Northwest Colorado, where I am from, but I was also able to gain a lot of practical experience through this internship. Being able to apply concepts learned in coursework from my higher education allowed for immense gratification, but it was also a great way to explore independence within a career. Dr. Christensen gave directions for the work I needed to complete but allowed me to take the lead on my projects. With that, I was given the opportunity to utilize my own judgment and work on a personalized timeline.

From the study itself, I was able to walk away with a much better understanding of the economic climate surrounding meat products in the region. From a production perspective, there are not many producers able to finish out livestock in the region as efficiently, and those that do typically sell into direct markets. From the public point of view, 98.6% of those that participated in our dot survey indicated that they would like to purchase local meat, which indicates a positive environment for producers selling regionally.

Throughout the internship, I was able to see how CSU Extension assists in numerous aspects of agriculture, and it opened my eyes to more possible career possibilities.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

We were able to connect with the ranching community in the region and come together with consumers and find the common ground needed to make local marketing a success. This feasibility study should also promote locally sourced meat products in the region by encouraging more producers to participate in local sales. With this, it also allows producers to comprehend the demand for their locally raised products, ensuring their own economic success while meeting the demand of consumers in the 3-county area. Considering the study is comprehensive for the region, it also allows the ranching community to remember its comradery and encourage utilization of more value-added programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Libby Christensen and the whole Northwest Colorado Meat Sector team for allowing me to be a part of this study and for supporting my professional development. Also, thank you to the CSU Extension Internship program for granting such an opportunity.