Cattle producers bring Ft. Pierre packing plant back online

Big Crow Valley Mills has a ‘Flex’ Call Center, Business Weekly

The slowest meat processing in the nation’s largest packing plant due to COVID-19 has spotlighted the need for smaller regional packing plants and locally owned locker facilities, according to Kim Ulmer of South Dakota. She is one of 15 investors that is planning a producers locker facility in Ft. Pierre, back online this May.

“We see it happen in the 10 wild places of the country where the large companies control the kill space and over 400,000 head of beef per week were wiped out. Now in the cattle industry, there are four packers that own over 80% of the kill space. Major corporations want to be ready to go, become employees and we can’t have that,” Ulmer said.

Once known as Bad River Rock, owned by Don and Mary Ward, the now updated facility is called U.S. Beef Producers and has investors from Minnesota, Dakota, and Nebraska. It has all cattle producers — either cattle feeders or ranchers — that have invested in this facility.

With help from the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, USDA Forest Service, and Dakota State University, U.S. Beef Producers was able to secure a $300,000 loan at a low-interest rate. “When I learned that the state was willing to help with the loan, it made the process of getting certiﬁed to go ‘go’ from them on and I really appreciated the help of the word out,” Ulmer says. “I could see a change in our community where credit is due and KPB has been getting the word out with Prarie Economic Development and Dakota State University and Ft. Pierre Economic Development Commission has been very helpful. It is important to know this system and lean in place in South Dakota. It is important to provide options to producers.”

He says understanding and meeting the regulations in place has been the toughest challenge. “I can see why more cattle producers don’t do this,” Ulmer said. The manual of requirements is 515 pages long. I’m glad the people that wrote the manual were thorough, but if at any point in this they could have made it a little less daunting, that would have helped. This past weekend, the plant just went through a successful test run of 13 head. The USDA will inspect May 1 and June 1 the plant should have full inspection criteria in place.

“We have a goal of harvesting 15 head a week by August 1. We want to get to 70 head a week but we will need to add on cooler space first,” Ulmer says. The locker plant has a three-legged approach to how the facility will harvest and market beef. First, the locker will be providing a custom harvest for cattle producers wanting to market their own livestock. Second, the initial investors and other cattle producers wanting to harvest and market their beef can do so under the U.S. Beef Producers label direct to households. Third, the U.S. Beef Producers will be processing supplying their country of origin, source-veriﬁed U.S. Beef Producers labels in stores. Currently, the facility is looking for cattle producers in each South Dakota county to see acre-sable sale reps to help get USDA Forest Service labeled meat in stores, restaurants and schools. “This year has proven that the big four meat packers can’t continue to handle everything. We want to take this model of small, clean processing plants that are owned and duplicated by all over South Dakota. This is going to be ‘producer to plate’ in the future. It allows getting meat to the retail level has been a five-year process. Now it is less than a year,” Ulmer said.

The Beef Market Region of the USDA Forest Service is releasing a new online tool as a place to find resources, updates, and resources for any of the 24 national forests and grasslands across Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming.

This new tool provides a one-stop resource for learning about current USDA Forest Service recreation site status updates, alerts, warnings and fire restriction information within the states of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. While the tool continues to list all forest roads and trails. US Forest Service officers engaging in fire suppression activities, such as ﬁre fighting, are taking extra precautions and are expected to be on alert for safety and responsibility guidelines.

Stay close to home to keep other communities safe.

May 6 feet apart from others.

Prevent in packing lots, trails, scenic overlooks and other areas.

Take CDC precautions to prevent illnesses like COVID-19.

Preparation for limited or no services, such as restroom facilities and garbage collection.

Prep to pack out trash and human waste.

All ofﬁces are conducting business and providing virtual services. For more information, please call the Fort Pierre Ranger District at 605-224-5517.

Avoid congregating in packing lots, trails, scenic overlooks and other areas.

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