

Cooperative Marketing of Alternative Meats in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Jennifer Thorn

Registered Dietitian & Extension Educator

University of Maryland Cooperative Extension, Mt. Lake Park, Maryland

A Small Meat Animal Project was initiated in Garrett County, Maryland, to assist agricultural producers in developing niche markets for alternative meat products in the Mid-Atlantic region. The project was implemented by Maryland Cooperative Extension with funding from a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant.

The intent of the program was to provide opportunities for rural rabbit and goat producers to enhance their household income levels. Long-term success for these small producers hinged on cooperative efforts in production and marketing of their products. Mt. Pride Cooperative was formed to enable producers to collectively market their meat products. Using this cooperative approach allowed for more control in managing the production, processing, packaging, and marketing of the USDA-inspected rabbit meat.

An agreement was made between the cooperative and a small processing facility to process the meat for retail sale. Market outlets were established with distributors to supply major retail chains. While Garrett County remains

the principal business hub, this project expanded to producers from Maryland, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. This increased agricultural production has established a sound foundation for a long-term small meat animal industry and has provided additional business revenues and jobs in a local economy that has suffered setbacks from economic downsizing.