



SSFPA Policy Research update December 2020

Our team continues to recruit stakeholders to participate in interviews about small-scale food processing. We have completed over 40 interviews and are working to add more before we can start reporting on our findings.

The participants so far have included processors, government representatives, farm groups, and food organizations. We have begun analysis, but our observations are just preliminary at this point. Nevertheless, these **early observations** are worth considering as this year comes to a close and we try to imagine what the post-pandemic food system will look like.

1. We are already noticing **differences in rural and urban experience**. Rural location, while conducive to mixed farm operations (that both produce and process food), is challenging when it comes to transportation, as shipping options tend to be limited and expensive.
2. Both urban and rural processors face challenges when it comes to growing their businesses. While some supports exist for start-ups, **financing that allows small enterprises to grow** is sorely lacking.
3. Canadian processing sector is in dire need of **infrastructure that supports small-scale enterprises**. Meat processing is particularly difficult, but kitchens, packing facilities, and distribution and sales channels are also too few in numbers to support a robust sector.
4. There are certainly individuals who work for government agencies and lending institutions that understand this sector and can be very helpful, but this seems to be person-dependent and unpredictable. For instance, local health units are sometimes more likely to help than hinder a processor's effort to meet safety standards, but this again can depend on who from the health unit is involved. A more deliberate effort to increase the **knowledge and understanding of this sector across relevant institutions** is needed.
5. Regulatory frameworks continue to present barriers. The processors we interviewed are committed to producing safe food, but much of **the regulation is designed for larger-scale operations**. Interprovincial trade barriers also present a challenge for businesses trying to grow.
6. The **challenges vary within the sector** too. Provinces have different programs that can support processors and experiences in different subsectors are also diverse. A cheesemaker may identify distribution as a key challenge, whereas a brewer's key challenge may have to do with sourcing locally produced ingredients.
7. **Innovation in the sector** is easily observed. Creative products and production processes, novel equipment and technologies, and innovation that supports community and environmental values, are all abundant in this sector.
8. Many processors suggested that in 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic, they have seen greater interest and support in their communities, as many start to better understand the need for **robust regional food systems** and recognize that strong regional processing is essential for such systems.

To learn more about this study or to inquire about participating in the interviews, please contact Irena Knezevic at irena.knezevic@carleton.ca