

## SARE GRANT EVALUATION

February 9, 2000

TO: Dr. Jim Gardiner  
FROM: Lydia Ratcliff  
RE: Vermont Meat Marketing Project #FNE 99-270

This project has turned into a "runaway success."

A few of our accomplishments:

We have incorporated as a farmer-owned cooperative called Vermont Quality Meats with 52 farmer members who have paid one-time dues of \$250.00 each.

We have developed a network of about 100 major customers in Boston, New York City, Vermont, and Westchester, and are expanding steadily.

We have sold well over \$200,000.00 worth of meat since we began less than a year ago and are now selling about \$1,000.00 a day worth of lambs, pigs, veal calves, deer, and game birds. We are considering a few more additions to our product list. Prices we are receiving are high and amounts we are paying producers (after 16% marketing fee) are in most cases double what they have been receiving in other markets such as livestock auctions.

The Merck Family Fund gave us an additional grant to use in purchasing a refrigerated truck and the Sustainable Jobs Fund has contributed toward a computer and accounting setup, a market survey, the costs of forming an organization complete with by-laws, protocols, board of directors, trade name, etc. The Vermont Department of Agriculture also contributed start-up funds. About ten part-time jobs for farmers (accounting, selling, delivering) have been created under the project.

We have had inquiries from many parts of the country about development of better markets for farm products.

So far we have sold virtually all of the qualifying lambs, goats, etc. that have been presented for sale. Our customers, which include quite a few of the top restaurants in Boston, New York, and elsewhere in our territory, tell us the quality of what we sell is better than they can get from any other service. We know of only one competitor selling products comparable to ours.

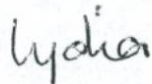
VQM is working with a number of chefs and organizations committed to the restaurant-farmer connection, using fresh meat grown with as little medication as possible, as humanely as possible. We continue to explore markets for meats from farms which are certified organic.

We are very concerned about assuring the continued existence of our small Vermont slaughterhouses, under tremendous financial pressure from regulatory agencies and seeking ways to relieve some of the pressure. Two slaughterhouses have been immensely cooperative and we fear that if either of them goes under, we might too.

The attached materials indicate some of the other directions in which we are moving.

All the best -- and so many thanks for your confidence.

Lydia

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lydia".