Making local meat truly local

Unlike fruits or vegetables, selling meat at the local farmer’s market isn’t as simple as bringing the food from the farm to the market. First the cattle, hogs etc. must be taken to a USDA-approved slaughterhouse. And that can make for a long round-trip for a product sold locally because slaughterhouses by and large are few and far between, according to an article published on NPR’s Salt blog.

The distance between slaughterhouses didn’t use to be as far, but as the article states:

“Over the past 20 years, slaughterhouse consolidation has left small scale producers scrambling. Just four corporations slaughter about 80 percent of the cattle in the United States. Many facilities now only process large numbers of animals at a time, and will not allow ranches to bring in – and get back out – the same animals.”

Now, some smaller slaughterhouses are returning in an aim to retain local dollars and the in-demand “local” label, ranging from small facilities to on-farm operations and mobile slaughterhouses.

Earlier this year, Harvest caught up with Kansas cattle rancher Mike Callicrate, who has a mobile slaughterhouse on his feedyard.

Mobile slaughterhouses bring further opportunities for local meat production, and the USDA has a program to subsidize them. But there is a down side. “the cost – upwards of $300,000 a piece – can be prohibitive, and waste water management is also an issue.”