Tracy Baker
Regional Director
Sarin Hoppe
Business Advisor/ COVID Specialist

Miles City Regional SBDC

Lame Jones Meats

Plevna, MT



"When we first came up with the idea for a meat processing facility, it was very overwhelming on where to start or how to start, the SBDC showed us! From the start up process of building a professional business plan to working on financials and filling out grants, they guided us and spent many hours working with us. We never could have done it without them."

Cassie O'Conner, Co-*Owner*

Ry O'Connor grew up on a ranch in Plevna, Montana, with strong community roots. He briefly left the state to attend college at Dickinson State University (DSU) in North Dakota, where he met his future wife Cassie, who also grew up in Montana.

After completing college, Ry and Cassie married and returned to Montana, purchasing part of Ry's family ranch where they raise cattle, sheep and grow certified organic crops.

In 2020, the lack of butcher shops and meat processors in eastern Montana became apparent. Even before the pandemic, there was a demand for more USDA-certified meat processors in the state. Ry and Cassie understood the frustration of fellow ranchers and their inability to butcher their livestock locally. They sympathized with consumers worried about the beef supply in grocery stores. Most importantly, they understood the importance of being progressive and adaptable in the agriculture industry.

While attending DSU, Cassie and Ry took a meat cutting class off-campus at Dean's Meat Market. With that knowledge and the demand for locally owned processors, they decided to explore the possibility of opening a meat processing facility on their ranch.

When researching their options, Cassie came across a Small Business Development Center post that piqued her interest. Cassie reached out to Tracy Baker, Regional Director, at the Miles City SBDC office.

Tracy assisted Ry and Cassie with their business plan and financial projections. She introduced additional resources through the Food and Ag Development Center (FADC), Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC), and Great Northern Development Corporation (GNDC) to assist with the project. Tami Burke, FADC Director at GNDC; Beth Epley, Executive Director at EPEDC; Dara Deines, Community Development Specialist at EPEDC; and Shandy Hanks, SBDC Regional Director at GNDC; assisted Ry and Cassie with completion of a Meat Processing Grant application made available by the state through Cares Act funding. They also assisted with the Growth Through Agriculture Grant (GTA) application process.

In September 2020, Lame Jones Meats was awarded $150,000 through the Meat Processing Grant. The grant funds were utilized to construct a new building for the operation. In November 2020, they were awarded $20,000 through the GTA grant, which helped them purchase a smoker and sausage maker.

Lame Jones Meats opened August 1, 2021, providing the communities in Southeast Montana with a local option for their meat processing needs. Ranchers have a reliable place to process their livestock, and local consumers have more locally produced meat options. Ry and Cassie also offer meat processing services to hunters and participants in organizations such as 4-H. Lame Jones Meats currently has one full-time and two part-time employees.