

Pandemic Adjustment Equipment Grant Fund Recipient: Marsh Creek Cattle & Company



Henry Spies V always knew he wanted to farm full-time after growing up on his family's farm and raising 4-H livestock. While in college (at the University of Maryland), and with help from his brother Austin Spies, he started Marsh Creek Cattle & Company, located in Caroline County. They raise beef cattle and pigs and have recently expanded into poultry. When the pandemic started, Marsh Creek Cattle experienced a surge of interest from new customers seeking to purchase their products.

"We had a lot of people looking towards us as a food source, especially when grocery stores ran out," said Spies. People came to realize some of the vulnerabilities in the food supply system.

Additional cold storage would be needed by Spies to meet this new market demand. It was while he was searching for financing opportunities to help the business grow that he came across MARBIDCO's Pandemic Adjustment Equipment Grant Fund.

"The grant was exactly what we needed; it came in at a perfect time," said Spies. With the grant, he was able to purchase a walk-in freezer, as well as build the infrastructure to support it. Prior to owning the freezer, he and his brother could only sell butchered cattle that had been sold in advance, either as whole, half or quarters. Immediately after butchering, they would have to deliver these orders.

The freezer allows them to store their products prior to delivery and expand their business into selling packaged retail cuts. This has allowed them to serve a new market that resulted from the pandemic.

“Without the walk-in freezer, we could only sell animals that were pre-sold. Now we can sell animals that are not necessarily sold prior to butchering. It helps our production model,” said Spies. “Without retail cuts, we are limited to customers who have a larger freezer.”

As interest in local food has grown because of the pandemic, the Spies Brothers opened an online store to sell their products, manage their inventory, and started offering subscription box presales. Next summer they also plan to raise 10,000 chickens, which they will store in their freezer and sell to retail customers, in addition to beef and pork products. Acquiring this grant funding also gave them the ability to leverage financing for a refrigerated box truck. As a result, they can now directly deliver meat orders to their customers.

Both Henry and Austin Spies are young farmers with a focus on a sustainable future. As livestock producers and entrepreneurs, they hope to exemplify how their ecological management model of pasture-raised beef, pork, and poultry will be an example to other farmers in the region.