



# MEAT PROCESSOR TALKS BROKEN NEEDLES, BUCKSHOT IN MEAT

Workflow disruption, product loss and a hit to beef's reputation

You get to know a thing or two about meat processing and product quality when you've been at it for 65 years. That's the history of Winnipeg-based Smith's Quality Meats.

A family owned, federally inspected plant, the company has built a reputation for quality and a loyal clientele over those years. Today product sales include corned beef for Safeway in Western Canada, sausages for Sobeys in Manitoba and fresh and frozen meats into Co-op channels in North-west Territories.

Andy Van Patter, Smith's operations manager, knows that anything that threatens that reputation, threatens the company. Broken needles and buckshot pellets certainly fall into that category.

He gives producers a look inside the issue in his plant with a plea for their understanding of three main things. This is an ongoing issue. It costs big. And producers are a key part of the solution.

## INCIDENCES CONTINUE

Despite efforts to prevent the problem, incidences of broken needles continue to occur. One example at Smith's was a non-detectable needle that passed through their metal detector unnoticed. It ended up in a deli product and the deli hit it with their meat slicer.

"That needle was about half an inch long and definitely could have caused an injury if



The beef industry doesn't want an injection error ending up on the dinner plate.

someone had eaten it with a meat cut," says Van Patter.

Buckshot pellets in meat are a growing issue. Pellets show up deep in meat. It doesn't appear to be accidental in many cases with a significant number showing up in the rump area.

"We've had two broken needles the past two years. We'll have about 10 incidences of buckshot pellets during hunting season and more sporadically throughout the year," he says.

## COST IS SUBSTANTIAL

Van Patter says the company looks at broken needles and buckshot as separate but related problems. Obviously, needles have more capacity to injure so they are the highest concern. But many producers would be surprised at the buckshot incidences.

The cost for managing these is significant, says Van Patter. To find a broken needle in a roast, for example, the only way is to keep cutting it in half and check each half until you find it. That often means lost product and lost time in the plant.

There's a hit to beef's reputation. Problems hit social media quickly and every recall shows a beef consumption drop that affects every producer, he says.

## PRODUCER HELP CRITICAL

"Think what a half inch needle could do stuck in someone's throat," says Van Patter. "Then imagine if this happened to your own family or friends.

"We need every beef producer's help to manage this."

Inject in the neck. "Our broken needles are showing up in the rump which means producers are not following recommended injection protocol."

Use detectable needles — because they allow metal detectors to do their job.

Be judicious about who you let hunt on your land and consider setting restrictions to avoid buckshot incidences.