

Mobile “Matanza” unit ready to hit the road

By Andy Dennison
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The much-ballyhooed Mobile “Matanza” may finally do what it’s intended to do: give ranchers and farmers more money for locally raised livestock.

Both the traveling slaughterhouse and a cut-and wrap facility at Taos County Economic Development Corp. (TCEDC) now qualify to process USDA inspected meats, a “milestone” that should translate into income for farmers and ranchers, according to TCEDC’s Pati Martinson.

“We’ve completed all the necessary documents and items, and we are set to go,” Martinson told *The Taos News*. “This

means the meat can be sold anywhere, in New Mexico or interstate. The ranchers are thrilled.”

With this certification, the mobile unit will head out to local ranches and farms, where livestock will be “humanely” slaughtered on site, and then the meat is transported to a refrigerated processing unit at the TCEDC offices off Salazar Road, Martinson said.

For now, inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture will rotate into Taos to examine and (hopefully) give their approval on locally raised beef, lamb, bison, goat and pig meats, she said. If volume dictates, USDA may place an inspector in Taos in the future, said Martinson. A local processing facility will give some livestock-raisers an alternative to selling their animals on the hoof for a much lower price than processing and selling the meat.

Several factors delayed the startup of the Mobile “Matanza” since Gov. Bill Richardson and the state Legislature lent their financial and political support to the project two years ago. First, several Northern New Mexico slaughterhouses went out of business, prompting TCEDC to focus on getting funds for the cut-and wrap facility before sending the “Matanza” out on the road. Without the processing unit, meat could not be brought to market. Second, USDA took over meat inspection duties from the New Mexico Livestock Board last summer, Martinson said, just as the Taos facility was poised to get in-state inspection certification that would have permitted sales within New Mexico. “In a way, it was good because our staff took classes (on food safety and humane slaughtering),” she said. “It’s really the Ph.D. of this process.”

TCEDC is currently scheduling the “Matanza” for area ranchers and farmers, and should be in full swing later this summer, Martinson said.

“This is a huge boon for Northern New Mexico,” she said, noting that restaurants and grocery stores are targeted markets. “Hopefully, it will help ranchers hang onto their lands and spawn some new businesses, which is what we are all about.”