

Organic Handling in Practice: Sailer's Food Market & Meat Processing

Kaylee Pickering (00:14):

This is Sailer's Food Market. Sailer's has been in business since 1923. We process specialty meats. We do a lot of custom processing. I started on the floor in high school. I found butchering to be very intriguing, and it made me very thankful for the farmers and the producers that we do have. And I've just slowly moved my way up in the business.

Kaylee Pickering (00:43):

Sailer's was not always organic. We became certified about 12 to 15 years ago. We had a customer come to us and ask if we would be able to process their organic beef. Knowing that going organic would open us up to a lot of new customers in different aspects in the business, it was something we jumped on board with. It was kind of self-taught. There wasn't a lot of resources or classes or anything online that I would be able to take. So it was watching videos, talking with inspectors, anybody in the USDA that had resources, and reading a lot of paperwork.

Kaylee Pickering (01:29):

Our organic processing is about a third of our overall production. For slaughter, when a customer wants to bring an animal to us that is organic, we have to make sure that that animal meets all the requirements. And then when they arrive at our facility, they have to be the first animal in. So we have no possible way of any cross-contamination.

Justin Fugate (01:53):

Run our animals in, whether it be beef, pigs, lambs, run them through our slaughter process. And from there, we will record everything out in a book. And we use the color green for anything that's organic. So we'll have green stickers on everything to keep that separation from organic and nonorganic. This is our carcass cooler, so as the animals come through, they'll go into this cooler. These are just regular conventional tags. The red line shows that it's under 30 months of age. If this was to be an organic beef, then this would be colored green. So from here, we'd go out to our cutting floor.

Kaylee Pickering (02:36):

Each animal has its own cutting instruction page. That cutting instruction follows that meat throughout.

Justin Fugate (02:44):

This buggy's going to get tagged with the customer's name. Then we're going to slap a green sticker on that tag that says the customer's name. And then my guys up on the other side of the room, when they go to grind it, are going to know, "Hey, we have organic beef this week."

Kaylee Pickering (03:00):

The biggest headache is having to keep everything separate. Whether it's raw materials or your ingredients and dry materials to keep that segregation is probably the hardest thing we have to do.

Justin Fugate (03:23):

So now we're up at our Sailer's 3.0 facility. So when we run organic stuff up here, if I'm doing summer sausage, it'll have those green loops on it. Everything gets assigned lot number, that lot code, and best-by date all gets printed right on that package.

Kaylee Pickering (03:43):

Organic and nonorganic processing actually work hand in hand together, in my opinion. They relate as far as tracing materials, any batch records, keeping things segregated. If you're following organic standard and processing, it seems everything else is just compliant.

Kaylee Pickering (04:06):

Finding organic ingredients is not always easy. You may find one and it's only available for so long or a certain time of the year. So we really have to dial in the seasoning and the ingredient statements to make sure that we're going to have full access to those ingredients throughout the year. If we want to change an organic formulation, our first step is to find a supplier that would carry those same materials. That takes time. So it usually comes to a point where you have to put the product on hold and go back into the R&D process to make sure that your flavor profiles are going to be the same or similar, making sure your pricing is going to be the same. There are a lot of variables when something is not available or changes. Once we have the materials on hand and we develop it, it's a matter of getting it approved through the customer and making sure that we're compliant with all the labels.

Justin Fugate (05:10):

So this would be our sanitation cage.

Kaylee Pickering (05:15):

Right now we do internal sanitation, so we have to make sure all of our chemicals are approved for organic production. We also have to make sure that when we are cleaning, that everything has to go through a rinse process after any chemicals have been used to make sure all of that has been completely removed from any equipment or food contact surfaces. When an organic carcass is butchered, first they're trimmed and then they're sprayed down with water. And then they do get peracetic acid sprayed onto them, which is also approved organic. So we're able to use that as an E. coli prevention step.



Kaylee Pickering (06:01):

Our first inspection was pretty intense. I wasn't so much stressed out, I was more kind of overwhelmed and confused with the way that they were doing things. At some points, they seemed a little laid back. And other times it's like, why are you spending an hour on this one topic because <laugh> we have other stuff to move on to. They come in and they want to see everything that you do. All of your processes, all of your paperwork, record keeping. They want to make sure that you're capable of keeping organic products separate and keeping that integrity is their main goal there.

Kaylee Pickering (06:41):

They'll also jump into a product traceback, so you have to do a mock recall. So you're going back on that product. For us, it's getting the lot number. Once we pull the lot number, we pull production date. After production date, we go and get all of the raw materials and ingredients or seasoning that was used in that product. So we're pulling bill of ladings, packing slips, sometimes invoices if those two documents don't give you enough information about the raw materials. That definitely takes up a lot of time.

Kaylee Pickering (07:20):

When I started organic processing and certification, I wish that I knew how different the inspectors were. And I also wish I knew that there were so many variations to organic processing as far as what raw materials and seasonings you're using. My advice is to constantly keep reading and learning and researching because you're going to learn so much exploring other facilities, and producers, and handlers, and suppliers.

Kaylee Pickering (07:54):

Being organic is definitely worth it. Being organic opens you up to a variety of customers and a market that a lot of people don't even know exists sometimes. It's just really exciting to see the community that you're involved in being organic. I also think being organic shows how much you care about your products and your customers, that you're willing to be honest and show your integrity and produce a quality product that people are going to enjoy and talk about.

