

**Workshop Title: On-Farm & Off-Farm Processing**

**Speaker(s) & their titles:** Guylaine Buecheli, Les viandes Rheintals (QC)

**Executive Summary**

In this presentation Guylaine Buecheli, who farms in Quebec, discusses her and her partner's farm and how it has grown to meet consumer demands. The couple raise pigs, cattle, and do their own processing at a butcher they co-own. More recently they've begun to cure and dry their own deli styled meats. Guylaine talks about the challenges they've faced as they expanded their business.

**Detailed Notes**

Les viandes Rheintal is a family owned second-generation family business that has been around for 25 years. The farm has been organic since 1984. The name comes from the company founder Hans Buecheli, who hails from the Rhein Valley, Switzerland. Sébastien Angers and Guylaine Buecheli are the current owners. They have two daughters, Alys and Méanne. Over time, they found that they could be complementary in their personality and in their work: Sébastien is a trained agronomist and he manages crops and livestock; Guylaine, with training in marketing and food processing, is engaged in that aspect of the business. The company has core principles and continues to work around three core values: authenticity, distinction and durability.

The farm strives for authenticity in all spheres of activity that they do: that is the first goal. From the quality of their products, to the combination of the old farming methods and modern expertise and understanding of today's agriculture.

Being a certified organic company is already a distinction. However, it is much more for them. They are always striving to innovate with the aim to find new methods and ways to make their operation more efficient while respecting the organic certification standards, reducing their environmental footprint and improving the comfort and well being of their animals. Believing in the ability to innovate and improve constantly.

This statement is at the core of the farms principles:

We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.  
- *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

That is why it is important to follow in our agriculture, soil, water and air, which play a vital role in the health of our planet. Respecting the environment by good practices of organic farming will preserve the land for future generations to come. They aim to be as

self-sufficient as possible in order to find balance in cycles that interact between the soil, plants and animals. They also believe that having a family farm in human dimension will preserve the balance of our farming communities and therefore retain the values that promote the health of our agriculture.

Les viandes Rheintal have 210 acres in production, with 60 beef that are pasture finished, and 200 hogs, which are pastured and grain finished. The farm has a 5,000 sq foot meat processing plant.

When Guylaine and Sébastien took over the family farm Guylaine researched info on butchering and worked weekends for a bucherie. Later she went on to open a farm stand at Jean Talon Farmers' Market and making contacts by going door to door.

Over the years the market demand has really caught up and they are now retailing:

- 40% direct sales: farmers markets, stands, website
- 30% natural food stores
- 16% at conventional stores
- 6% restaurants
- 8% delicatessen

They focus a lot on their marketing using:

- exhibitions
- word of mouth
- brochures
- in store
- web, Facebook

Their main customer base is health-oriented individuals, people with European origins, mothers, ethnic families looking for quality alternatives, and vegetarians! They strive to keep a strong relationship with the customers. People who tend to buy their meat want to have a relationship with the farmer, and a consistent product.

They own a 30% share in Viandes Morrisette - a butcher shop in Quebec. They thought it was a good idea to co-own the business as it would ensure quality organic processing and give them access to a larger team of skilled professionals. They have since invested in adding a commercial kitchen and meat dryer to the butcher shop.

The inspiration for their products comes from Switzerland and France where small-scale custom charcuterie is a well-established and important industry. They spent time in France studying the methods and then had a butcher come to Quebec to train them.

They distribute their products with a refrigerated truck.

The employ 5 people and believe they have received valuable training and experience by hiring a deli meat consultant when they started and also by taking both business and personal coaching. This has allowed them to juggle marriage and being business partners.

They've also received a lot of support from La Financier Agricole and the Societé d'aide au Developpment des Collectivites (SADC).

Centralizing their operation was a strategic decision that they found has helped reduce waste, facilitate better communication, keep on top of production costs, and have more control over distribution logistics.

They've faced a lot of challenges as the business has grown.

Branding has been very important in keeping a consistent product. They worked hard to build good relationships with their market and continue to keep that a priority.

They've invested in a grain mill and have had to learn a lot about their pastures and the system they wanted to implement for their animals.

#### Question and Answer

Q - How to get your meat to marble without grain?

A – A heavy protein start, and finished with high energy pasture. Also the breed of your stock.

Q - How did you learn to butcher?

A - Interned with a professional for a long time.

Q - Would you move to only direct sales?

A - No, restaurant sales are very profitable. One thing to focus on increasing is processing of fine deli meats.

They deliver to the front door of consumers for purchases of \$250. Being close to a densely populated city makes this feasible.

Q - Did you have any trouble getting the charcuterie certified?

A – No, the inspectors were very helpful.

Q - How long until they are debt free?

A - Likely 20 years if they can continue at this rate.

Sébastien says, “Consumers aren’t buying product but a value.”