

Local businesses not seeing effects of looming "bacon shortage"

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ALTON - According to reputable media outlets, including *USA Today* and *Forbes*, the country is about to face a daunting shortage of one of its favorite commodities - bacon.

An article from today's *USA Today*, which originally ran in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, stated the frozen pork belly inventory of the entire nation as of December 2016 was 17.8 million pounds - a large number, but it is the lowest amount of pork belly in the national reserves since 1957, according to the **United States Department of Agriculture**. Ironically, pork production is on the rise.

The article quoted the **Ohio Pork Council**, a Columbus, Ohio-based non-profit. According to that council, prices of bacon are on the rise, with a 20 percent increase since January. The council said foreign demand may also account for the shortage, with 26 percent of its total productions being exported.

Those price increases have not been seen by Riverbend businesses. **Beth Arrowsmith**, co-owner of **Hansen's Meat Market**, located at 450 Landmarks Blvd. in Alton, said she was not aware of the apparent pork belly shortage.

"I know right now the prices on pork are pretty reasonable," Arrowsmith. "Beef prices are pretty reasonable too. Right now, we haven't had any problems. We're still bringing in hogs to process."

Arrowsmith said hogs and cows are brought as often as twice a week for slaughter at their **Jerseyville** store, located at 807 Illinois Route-16. She said as long as farmers continue raising livestock, she does not expect any sort of price jump.

"There are still people raising hogs out there, which is a good thing, too," she said. "When that starts tapering off, that's when we should worry a bit. Usually whenever there is a shortage like that, prices go through the roof. The price of livestock affects the price of feed, which affects things like oil, which affects everything else."

Fred Schulte, the owner of Frozen Foods and Meat Market at 246 N. Main St. in Edwardsville said his business still prepares to sell bacon the old-fashioned way, curing and smoking their own.

"We buy fresh sides of pork, which is cured and smoked and we have had no problems getting them," he said. "Price wise, it is maintaining, but maybe a little higher for this time of year. Overall, price and getting fresh sides of pork has been pretty normal."

Workers at **Godfrey Meat Market**, located at 6017 Godfrey Rd., echoed Hansen's statements, saying they have not experienced a drastic change in any of their pork prices.

In a report issued on Dec. 23, 2016, by the **National Agricultural Statistics Service**, the **Agricultural Statistics Service** and the United States Department of Agriculture, the agencies declared the United States inventory of all hogs and pigs from Dec. 1, 2016 was 71.5 million, which was a four percent increase from Dec. 1, 2015 and a slight increase from Sept. 1, 2016. The breeding inventory was up one percent from both 2015 and the previous quarter at 6.09 million.

A report issued by **FarmDoc Daily**, through the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** said those numbers from the Department of Agriculture indicate pork output will increase by about three percent in 2017 to 25.7 billion pounds. It also expects 2017 to provide "weak returns" for pork producers, advising to keep further expansion to a minimum.

The FarmDoc report also considered pork exports in relation to the Trump Administration to be an issue of concern to pork farmers across the country, stating:

Pork exports to China will bear watching in 2017. Last year, exports to China nearly doubled growing to near 16 percent of total exports. Also of deep interest to the pork industry in 2017 will be the position of the new administration on trade issues and how that might impact agriculture. Mexico became the number one destination for U.S. pork in 2015 and 2016 so that trade relations with Mexico will need to be watched carefully for potential impacts on the hog market.