



HB 2785 - State Meat Inspection Program Grant Fund

February 2021

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2785

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee:

My name is Susanne Ritter. I am a cattle producer in Bend, Oregon.

Oregon desperately needs more meat processing capacity, which is why the legislature recently enacted the [State Meat Inspection Program](#). However, to be truly successful, the State Meat Inspection Program needs a concurrent grant fund to help expand processing capacity, especially in rural Oregon.

I am asking you to support [HB 2785](#), which would establish a \$10 million grant program to fund expansion, upgrades, and technical and other necessities, such as equipment, as laid out in the [programs in other states](#). Additional facilities boosting Oregon's processing capacity could:

- Support local, direct to consumer meat sales
- Increase regional food system resilience and rural economic development
- Support producers' ability to donate locally produced meat to food banks and other community assistance programs
- Give producers greater control over the price they receive for livestock
- Diversify processing options and reduce risk of processing bottlenecks
- Allow producers to find a local facility to slaughter and process livestock in remote locations across the state
- Reduce transportation time and costs for producers, and lessening carbon footprints

Oregon's already acute lack of meat processing capacity has been severely strained during Covid-19, as industrial meat processing facilities were closed by virus outbreaks and out-of-state producers sent meat to the Pacific Northwest for processing, taking away precious processing slots for Oregon farmers and ranchers. Increased demand for local meat also further taxed an already burdened system, with even seasoned producers lamenting the loss of processing slots.

Having sufficient meat processing capacity is important to me because we already have to schedule a year ahead of time just to get slaughter appointments, and that is not always possible (cattle dies, gives birth, unexpected things happen). Our butcher is overworked and cannot keep up with the demand for small producer meat cutting. It affects everyone down the line. Further, the demand is growing with the growth of our population. Bend has been in the top 10 growing cities in the nation for the last 10 years and still is. Also, growing awareness of the health benefits of grass-fed beef will continue to increase demand as the chance of getting breast cancer is 60% higher if you eat corn-fed beef from Safeway instead of grass-fed beef from a local small ranch like ours.

And, as the Covid-19 health crisis is far from over, as the disease continues to spread and produces new and more virulent strains, meat processors will continue to be in danger of being shut down and not being able to meet demand, which will start to impact food safety in Oregon.

Thank you,

Susanne Ritter, cattle producer, Bend