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Increase Regional Food Security and Rural Economic Development by Investing in Expanding Meat Processing Capacity through HB 2785A

Dear Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward and Rayfield and Members of the Committee:

My name is Carol L. Lorenzen. I am the Department Head of Animal and Rangeland Sciences and a Professor of Meat Science at Oregon State University.

Oregon State University supports House Bill 2785A which will establish a grant program to allow existing meat processing facilities to upgrade their establishments to comply with new inspection policies being established by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The role of meat inspection is to assure the public that the meat product(s) produced are wholesome and safe for consumption. To comply with regulations related to materials used in meat processing facilities under inspection, most facilities will have to upgrade some aspects to materials that meet the inspection guidelines.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed a break in the marketing chain for all livestock producers as there has been an overall lack of capacity to process livestock into meat in Oregon. Oregon State University has heard from several stakeholders in the livestock industry that there is a need for increased meat processing capacity. This increase in capacity can come in two forms, increasing capacity of existing facilities and new facilities being built. Currently, faculty in the Department of Animal & Rangeland Sciences and the Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network, facilitated by Oregon State University Extension, are engaged with the Oregon Department of Agriculture's working groups for the development of a state meat inspection program. Oregon State University's role in the state meat inspection program will be to provide education to meat processors on food safety requirements. While Oregon State University is already providing this education to multiple aspects of the food industry, we anticipate an increased need with the adoption of state meat inspection.

Grants from this program will allow local meat processors working under custom exempt or retail exempt regulatory guidance to become part of a state meat inspection program. This will add to rural economic development in two ways. First, livestock producers will be able to sell meat in farmer's markets or to local restaurants, thereby increasing their marketing options. Second, it will allow the meat processor to market value-added meat products in more than just their one, physical location, again, increasing marketing options. In addition, having meat products with a state meat inspection legend on them will promote confidence in the consumer that the products are safe. This will increase income of both livestock producers and meat processors which has historically stayed in the local economy.

A portion of funding in this bill will support upgrades to the Clark Meat Science Center in Corvallis. The current meat laboratory at Oregon State University was built in 1967 and has had minimal remodeling to the original structure. During that time, we have seen substantial changes to cattle genetics that have resulted in increased carcass sizes. Updating the Oregon State University meat lab to maintain alignment with current industry and government inspection standards and accommodate the livestock of today will add needed slaughter capacity for Oregon producers. These Meat Lab improvements will also aid in the teaching mission by exposing stakeholders and students to modern equipment and procedures in a facility demonstrating current Covid-19 processing guidelines. It will aid in the research mission by allowing the processing of modern beef to better reflect the industry and aid in the extension mission by providing a model facility for the Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network. In addition, an updated facility would increase collaboration with the Oregon Department of Agriculture in training future Oregon meat processors on best processing practices and meat inspection regulations.

Sincerely,

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Carol L. Lorenzen, PhD
Professor and Department Head