



## Meat Processing in Wisconsin Challenges & Opportunities

Local meat processing is crucial for family farms who sell processed meat directly to consumers or through food co-ops and other retail venues. This allows farmers to set their own price rather than having to sell animals through unpredictable conventional markets; it's an important pathway to ensuring a future for family farms in Wisconsin. But for several years, Wisconsin Farmers Union has heard rising concerns from farmers about meat processing capacity challenges statewide.

The lack of processing capacity is a stumbling block that hinders farmers from growing to meet consumer demand. Farmers throughout the state are reporting processing wait times as far as a year or two out, meaning some are having to reserve butcher appointments even before the animal to be processed is born.

On a national level, meat processing has become increasingly vertically integrated, with four companies controlling a majority of U.S. meat processing. A mere 50 meat plants slaughter and process 98% of the national meat supply — investing in processing is an investment in the security of our food supply.

*Meat Processing Infrastructure* was among the Special Orders of Business set by the grassroots WFU membership in 2021, and we will continue to seek solutions.



*"We went from being able to get most of our needs met in our county to suddenly having to go significantly outside of the county for meat processing. We were at a point last year where I was getting worried I'd be butchering a bunch of pigs and lambs myself because it took me so long to find a processor."*

— Menomonie, WI farmer Rachel Henderson

*"It used to be that most rural communities had a butcher shop, but through the years, we've lost a lot of those with monopolization of the meat industry. We need to invest in that infrastructure if we're serious about opening up ways for farmers to direct-market and get out from under the conventional markets."*

— Holcombe, WI farmer Danielle Endvick



*"Consumers need to connect to their food. But farmers also need to connect with consumers, it gives them pride and a sense of community. There's a quiet revolution of customers asking for that connection. We have so much power to build a resilient infrastructure and community. It has to include meat processing. "*

— Blanchardville, WI farmer April Prussia

## ***What can the state do?***

### **SUPPORT GOV. EVERS' 2021-2023 WISCONSIN STATE BUDGET**

Funding within the budget would develop the state's small meat processing infrastructure:

- Provide grants to new meat processors and existing small plants to fund facility upgrades, equipment, and cold storage to increase capacity, upgrade inspection level, and meet the needs of small & medium livestock producers.
- Fund additional state meat inspectors as needed to accommodate growth in processing infrastructure.
- Direct federal COVID-19 relief funds to expanding meat processing infrastructure.

### **INVEST IN MEAT PROCESSING AS CRITICAL RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

WFU also advocates for financial support from public-private partnerships and County Economic Development agencies to increase processing capacity and start new state and USDA-inspected meat processors, as meat processing has great potential to strengthen rural economies.

### **CONSIDER INNOVATIVE APPROACHES LIKE MOBILE PROCESSING & HALAL**

WFU urges DATCP to consider ways to foster growth and increase capacity of small-scale processors and those that offer USDA, organic, Halal, and Kosher certification. Mobile processing and other on-farm processing facilities are innovative approaches that could help farmers in regions that are especially suffering from a lack of processing capacity.

### **STREAMLINE REGULATIONS AND EASE THE PROCESS FOR INTER-STATE SALES**

Allow meat product sales across state lines if inspected through state, Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs.

### **SUPPORT EFFORTS TO TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF BUTCHERS**

There is a severe shortage of skilled butchers. WFU encourages support for programs like the Artisanal Modern Meat Butchery Program at Madison College, which is one of few such programs training in the next generation of butchers. We also support the development of on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs for meat cutters.

### **HELP SMALL AND REGIONAL PROCESSORS ACCESS NEW MARKETS BY DEFRAYING INSPECTION COSTS**

Assisting custom-exempt livestock processors with the cost of state inspection would provide access to a broader market.

## ***What can we do at the federal level?***

### **SUPPORT THE NEW MARKETS FOR STATE-INSPECTED MEAT AND POULTRY ACT OF 2021**

This would allow meat and poultry products inspected by State Meat and Poultry Inspection programs to be sold in interstate commerce. Under the inspection programs, the Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service allows states that meet certain requirements to inspect meat and poultry. The state-inspected products are currently limited to intrastate commerce, unless a state opts into a separate Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program.

**HOLD HEARINGS ON LIVESTOCK MANDATORY PRICE REPORTING** and reauthorize the legislation.

**SUPPORT LEGISLATION SUCH AS THE "50/14 RULE"** requiring larger meat packers to buy more beef on the open market.

### **STRONGER ENFORCEMENT OF ANTITRUST IN THE MEAT PROCESSING INDUSTRY**

The "Big Four" — Tyson Foods, JBS, Cargill, and National Beef — have been accused of conspiring to fix cattle prices. Stronger scrutiny is needed in addressing antitrust in agriculture.

### **PASS THE STRENGTHENING LOCAL PROCESSING ACT**

This would increase the federal share of costs for state inspection and for Cooperative Interstate Shipment facilities. It would also provide grants to small processors, state inspected facilities, and custom exempt facilities and help fund training programs.

### **PASS THE BIPARTISAN FARMING SUPPORT TO STATES ACT**

This would provide states with flexible funding to aid in responding to urgent and emerging issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in America's agriculture economy and food supply chain.

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