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Testimony in Support of HB 3372 Oregon Department of Agriculture Rules for Meat Processing

Chair Clem, Members of the Committee

Friends of Family Farmers represents small and mid-sized family farmers and ranchers across Oregon. To identify our policy priorities, since 2009 we have conducted listening sessions with producers around the state. In 2018, we held 19 farmer and rancher listening sessions, hearing from over 200 producers of various types. One of the primary issues that emerged, particularly from more remote parts of Oregon, was the need for greater access to small farm meat processing infrastructure.

Oregon has seen a significant decline in USDA-inspected slaughter and processing facilities that serve smaller producers in recent decades, and roughly 300 Oregon meat-processing facilities have closed in the last 35 years. In order for a producer to sell meat retail, wholesale, at farmers markets, or to restaurants, they must utilize a USDA-inspected facility. With only 13 USDA-inspected facilities serving the entire state, producers have limited options, and even these facilities are limited in their days and times of operation by the need to have a USDA inspector in site.

The lack of USDA processing infrastructure means that some producers have to transport livestock hundreds of miles or hours away from their farm or ranch for processing. Due to high demand on these facilities, producers often have to reserve time at these facilities up to 6-8 months in advance. This combination of factors can add significant cost and time for producers who are already operating on small margins.

By creating a pathway for state-licensed processing of beef and lamb produced and sold within the state of Oregon, it will open up economic opportunities for many smaller producers around the state while providing greater access to locally produced meat. One amendment we would suggest would be to add swine and goat to the list of livestock included in this bill.

We understand that the federal meat processing rules may provide limited flexibility on what the state is able to do. Nonetheless, we hope the discussions around HB 3372 can lead to greater access to small farm meat processing infrastructure, and potentially to technical and financial support to help reverse the trend and bring back small farm meat processing infrastructure that has been lost.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ivan Maluski
Policy Director