



Oregon Pasture Network

A Program of Friends of Family Farmers

opn@friendsoffamilyfarmers.org

(503) 581-7124

www.oregonpasturenetwork.org

February 4, 2021

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of HB 2785 and am contacting you on behalf of the Oregon Pasture Network (OPN), a community of 73 pasture based livestock farms, representing over 8,500 acres of farmland in Oregon. Our network represents producers of all sizes, from 3 to 1,500 acres, and most of our members sell their meat and other animal products directly to their consumers via farmstands, farmers markets, and straight from the farm. I am writing to urge you to support HB 2785 and the amendment.

HB 2785 represents the first step in fixing a problem that has reduced the potential of independent, community-oriented, high-quality livestock producers in Oregon for decades.

There are simply not enough meat processing facilities to meet demand. The pandemic laid bare the infrastructure problems that our members have seen for years. It also showed more than ever the importance of buying local for shorter supply chains and resilient local economies, which in turn created higher demand for local, pasture-raised meats. Contrary to initial predictions, this demand has maintained, and in many places, grown since the advent of COVID-19. In order for farmers to sell meat by the cut (which remains the most popular method for customers), farmers must use a USDA inspected (or State level equivalent as proposed in HB 2785) processing facility. These facilities are overwhelmed with demand, often cancelling appointments with smaller producers even when they have been booked up to a year in advance. The USDA inspectors are often not in touch with the norms of farming in Oregon and do not always work with the farmers to return offal and other organ meats the customers request.

Because of the lack of capacity at existing facilities, many of our members have had to cull their herds, postpone expansion, or bow out of market opportunities, even when they have waiting lists of customers stretching into the next year. Even when farmers can secure appointments farmers often have to drive many hours to these scarce facilities, wasting valuable time away from the farm. For our members, and many more farmers in Oregon, this represents not only a loss of income, but a waste of resources building up their presence and customer base. The Oregon public is demanding meat that is raised locally, on a scale that is appropriate to the land the farmer works, which respects the climate and natural systems in place and creates

opportunity in the community. Our members are filling this niche, but can't keep up with demand because of the lack of processing infrastructure.

This bill would provide much needed grant funding for the expansion, upgrade, and establishment of more facilities to expand processing capacity in the state. The OPN and our members urge the committee to take the legislation and the amendment expanding this grant funding to new facilities very seriously. Without the opening of new facilities and the expansion of existing ones, this problem cannot be solved by a state inspection program alone. There needs to be an expansion of the meat processing capacity in Oregon generally in order to continue the vibrant Oregon family farm tradition.

Sixteen other states have chosen to provide similar funding opportunities to processors to expand capacity. Time has shown that the cost of upgrading existing processing facilities and building new ones is often prohibitive without this assistance. In addition, the farms who most need processors are in communities that would benefit from the jobs and tax revenue produced by these facilities. This is not only vital infrastructure to sustain the viability of the farms in the OPN and their peers, but this is also necessary to have a robust, resilient, localized food system to keep meat on the tables of Oregon families.

In conclusion, Oregon's small, pasture based animal producers need more options to get their meat from the field to their customers' hands. This bill would not only provide more local control of the inspection process and be responsive to the needs of Oregon farmers, but it also affords the opportunity to open new facilities in all corners of the state. These aspects combined will reduce barriers for meat producers and meat processors while strengthening rural economies and the state's food system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alice Morrison".

Alice Morrison
Program Manager
Oregon Pasture Network