



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 Brian Lepore, owner of Golden Eagle Organics in Bend. A major part of our production is lamb and goat meat cuts for direct-to-consumer sales.

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
- 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 a successful State Meat Inspection program is critical to our business. Because we are a direct-to-consumer-producer, it's important to offer as much flexibility as possible. In previous years we were able to hold animals until we pre-sold a sufficient number to justify the 6 hour round trip to the butcher. Now we've had to preschedule our dates into 2022 because butcher dates are in such high demand. Also, a significant portion of our carcasses are sold to consumers as wholes and halves at a lower price point than buying individual cuts. In previous years, a selling point for buying a whole or half was that customers could call in their personal cutting order to have the carcass cut to their specifications. This was an important service for our customers to ensure they received the cuts that they wanted. The COVID exacerbated shortage of processors and processing time led to our processor revoking this service. Now all of our carcasses must be processed identically. We also are 3rd-party certified for Animal Welfare and Grass-fed meats. This is an important part of what we promise to our customers. There are only two meat processors in the state with the animal welfare certification, so we have to drive from Bend to Springfield to get our animals processed. Allowing more state inspected plants would allow more plants that wanted to offer niche marketing to their producers.

Thank you,

Brian Lepore
Owner of Golden Eagle Organics, Bend