

February 2021

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2785

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee:

My name is Aimee Danch. I am the owner operator of Square Mile Ranch in Wallowa, Oregon. We raise cattle, sheep, hogs, lambs and poultry and sell throughout Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. We currently process meat within the county (kill and cut and wrap), but our situation - and our entire livelihood - is dependent on the successful transition of these two businesses to the next owners, which is imminent. We truly do not have a viable "plan b" due to the lack of access, funding, and incentives for the next generation of butchers. We should not have to build a successful ranching and farming business AND take on our own slaughterhouse because it's our only option. We must as a state and country bring value and respect back to processing jobs. Thank you for taking this seriously before a lot of producers are in serious trouble.

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 important to me because medium producers have almost no other options. We also need mobile abattoirs to be a viable business option for Custom Exempt sales. This is about taking care of the people who steward this country's land. The decline of small to medium processors should never have happened, now is the time to fix it.

We got lucky with Covid last year because we had our kill slots booked over a year in advance and we were able to execute them perfectly, however the likelihood of that happening again is slim, and for many it did not go that way.

We will open a plant if we have to, but we need support and we need to actively and seriously train the next generation not only through funding but by bringing respect back to the trade and creating jobs and business that people actually want to have.

Thank you for doing what needs to be done for the people who feed you,

Aimee Danch
Square Mile Ranch
Wallowa, OR