

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2785

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jonathan Holtan. I am an eater and advocate in Bend, Oregon.

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 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 other states' plans. 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 more significant control over the price they receive for livestock
- Diversify processing options and reduce the 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

Covid-19 has only shown how Oregon has an acute lack of meat processing capacity. Industrial meat processing facilities were closed by virus outbreaks. 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 further taxed an already burdened system, with even seasoned producers lamenting the loss of processing slots.

Having a successful State Meat Inspection program is essential because I am a resident of Central Oregon and enjoy the vast local organic farmers and ranchers. It is time to expand the facilities of Oregon to meet the growing need and population. One of these is, expanding small meat production to help maintain many lifestyles and diets. It is a shame to know that larger meat producers are hindering small meat production by overwhelming the plants because of COVID-19 shutdowns. Trying to lump all meat producers together stifles economic growth by applying a one size fits all approach to meat production. We all know this is not fair and hurts everyone involved. Rising meat prices are slowing economic recovery, and this creates a negative feedback loop in our communities. COVID-19 is a worldwide challenge that requires us to step up with new policies that encourage local farmers and ranchers.

Oregon should rise to the occasion and open a new plant to allow small scale meat producers to serve their customers.

Thank you,

Jonathan Holtan (Bend, Oregon)