

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-230  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We appreciate the bipartisan leadership you provided in passing the CARES Act. While additional relief is needed, the CARES Act recognized and provided relief for farmers and ranchers whose markets have disappeared due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

As of Friday, May 2, 2020, beef processing was down 26 percent and beef production was down 24 percent over the past four weeks compared to the same time-period in 2019. This loss in processing has resulted in a reduction of 507 million pounds of beef and created a backlog of 667,000 cattle waiting to be processed. The pork and poultry industries are facing similar backlogs resulting in protein shortages nationwide.

While the best solution to this problem is to get meat and pork processing facilities back up and running at capacity, we have state-based solutions to help offset the problem. Specifically, we urge you to include the New Markets for State-Inspected Meat and Poultry Act in the next relief package.

This bill would allow meat and poultry products inspected by Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) approved state Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs to be sold across state lines. State-inspected meat and poultry facilities are required by FSIS to be at least equal to federally inspected processing facilities. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 27 states currently operate MPI programs. Products inspected by state MPI programs are already sold for public consumption, however, they are restricted for sale within the state of inspection.

These products are safe for consumption and should be allowed to be sold nationwide. Don't just take our word for it, listen to Dr. Dustin Oedekoven, DVM, DACVPM, State Veterinarian and Executive Secretary of the South Dakota Animal Industry Board.

“State and federal food safety agencies have cooperated for over 50 years to ensure that state inspected meat products are safe and wholesome. State programs use the same HACCP-based food safety systems, similar pathogen sampling protocols and laboratories, and the same antemortem and postmortem inspection processes. The differences between modern state and federal meat inspection programs are not related to food safety. Recent supply chain disruptions related to COVID-19 demonstrate the important contribution of small state inspected establishments to the security of our nation’s food supply, and to the ongoing continuity of business to our nation’s livestock producers. It’s time to allow interstate sales of state inspected meat products to consumers nationwide.”

According to FSIS, they already have “cross utilization agreements with the 27 state Meat and Poultry Inspection programs that allow for using inspectors at either state or federal establishments as needed and reimburses the appropriate state agency for the service. These state programs have been made aware that FSIS may utilize their inspectors if necessary.”

FSIS and state program directors agree, products processed at state-inspected facilities are already ‘at least equal to’ federal inspection, or they wouldn’t allow the products to be sold at all. Nor would they allow the inspectors of those products to be utilized by federal inspections.

It is time to end this arbitrary regulation restricting the sale of these products to within state lines and allow facilities inspected by MPI programs to increase production and sell their product nationwide. Including the New Markets for State Inspected Meat and Poultry Act in future COVID-19 relief legislation is good for producers and consumers.

Again, we appreciate your leadership and we look forward to working with you in continuing to support our farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

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Sen. M. Michael Rounds

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Sen. Angus S. King, Jr.

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Sen. Steve Daines

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Sen. Jon Tester

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Sen. Kevin Cramer

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Sen. Tina Smith

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Sen. Michael B. Enzi

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Sen. Joe Manchin III

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Sen. John Barrasso, M.D.

*\*The Senators listed above support the contents of this letter. Due to COVID-19, physical signatures for this letter were not collected.*