



Local and Regional Processing

A severe shortage of livestock processing is hurting family farmers and keeping them from expanding their farm businesses. As a result, MFU members from several counties passed resolutions calling for action at the state and federal level.

These resolutions were passed at county conventions in 2020 and 2021 and adopted as a special order of business at the state conventions in 2020 and 2021. Special orders of business are priorities of members.

What's the issue?

"When I was growing up, my father had several options for marketing his hogs within 10 to 12 miles of our Kerkhoven farm. During COVID-19, our nearest buyer, who was about 20 miles away, closed due to fewer hogs coming through and staffing shortages. Now, the nearest hog buyer is more than 40 miles away from our farm and there is only one buyer."

- Josh VanDerPol, Kerkhoven

Family farmers depend on processors, distributors, and retailers to both produce food, fuel, and fiber, and bring those goods to market. A severe shortage of small and mid-sized processors has put pressure on small producers, limiting their farm businesses at a time when consumers are increasingly concerned about where their food comes from. Processing availability at a small or mid-sized processor gives livestock producers another option to market their livestock, which can boost and diversify their farm income. In addition, a strong network of local and regional processing strengthens and increases the resiliency of the U.S. food supply chain.

According to a May 2020 report, more than half of the farmers surveyed who marketed directly to consumers lacked adequate meat processing and only 17 percent of those surveyed had adequate processing. More than half of respondents, 54 percent, said they would raise more livestock if there was more processing available.

Lack of skilled labor is another factor limiting expansion. Minnesota's last meat processing training program ceased in 2006.



What is MFU doing to address the lack of access to processing and what has MFU accomplished to create more access?

MFU advocated for funding to expand small and mid-scale meat and poultry processing at the Minnesota Legislature and secured:

- \$750,000 to start or expand meat and poultry processing plants;
- \$110,000 to hire additional inspection staff;
- \$150,000 to hire a dedicated meat scientist, and
- Funding for a new meat processing technical training program that includes a mobile slaughter unit.

MFU commented on USDA's request for comments on "Investments and opportunities for meat and poultry processing infrastructure." USDA requested public comment after committing \$500 million to expand meat processing capacity. MFU asked USDA to:

- Prioritize increased access to inspected slaughter. In Minnesota, 31 of the state's 55 state-inspected, "equal to" facilities, didn't incorporate slaughter as of August 2021.
- Support workforce training to help meet the needs of processors seeking to expand.
- Advance labor-saving innovations, including robotics and plant reorganization, to help workers complete tasks more easily and efficiently and improve working conditions.
- Support new models, including mobile slaughter, which has the potential to improve animal welfare and meat quality.

- Support succession planning for small processing plants. In many cases, owner-operators are nearing retirement and technical assistance, financial planning and other support for transition should be prioritized.
- Offer assistance to small to mid-size plants to expand capacity to include multiple species and certifications, including organic, Kosher or Halal.
- Help organize farmers to best use existing plant capacity, perhaps through organizing cooperatives.
- Restrict large packers from receiving grant funds or purchasing businesses who received grant funds.

Due to the state investment, farmer interest and student demand, Central Lakes College in Staples and Ridgewater College in Willmar are starting meat cutting training programs. The programs begin in fall 2022.

- Learn more about the meat cutting program at Central Lakes College: <http://www.clcmn.edu/meat-cutting-and-butchery/>
- Learn more about the program at Ridgewater: <https://ridgewater.edu/academics/areas-of-study/agriculture-veterinary-technology/meat-cutting/>

What are next steps?

Minnesota Farmers Union continues to advocate on the local, state and national level for the investment and reforms needed to build a meat processing system that is resilient, fair and meets the needs of our members.

Are you interested in joining Minnesota Farmers Union members as they work to increase access to meat processing and build a more resilient food supply system?

Go to www.MFU.org to click and join.



Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers



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