

May 4, 2020

Dear Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the House Agriculture Committee:

The undersigned organizations, farms, and ranches urge you to join the bipartisan group of legislators who are sponsoring H.R. 2859, the Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption Act (the PRIME Act), and help move this important bill forward as quickly as possible.

This bill addresses a long-standing problem: the lack of accessible, small-scale meat processing facilities. With the current wave of closures of massive meatpacking plants, reforming the federal law that hampers small local facilities is more vital than ever. Multiple large-scale slaughterhouses owned by the largest processors have closed. Some of these slaughterhouses each account for 4 to 5% of the national processing capacity in beef or pork. Dozens more have confirmed COVID-19 cases among their employees, and even more have had to slow down their processing speeds due to social distancing requirements, as will any of the plants that re-open while the pandemic continues.

Livestock farmers and ranchers are facing devastating losses because the meatpacking companies have slowed or stopped buying livestock, and the producers have nowhere else they can go. American consumers are facing higher prices and possible meat shortages in the coming months.

These issues are the logical result of the highly consolidated meatpacking industry, which puts a small handful of companies in control of our food supply. Four companies control processing of over 80% of the country's beef, and four companies control the processing of two thirds of the country's pork.ⁱ The consolidation has led to most meat being processed at massive plants where as many as 400 cattle are slaughtered an hour.ⁱⁱ **While there is no silver bullet that will solve the entire problem, the PRIME Act is an important step that could help both consumers and farmers, during this crisis and beyond.**

One of the main reasons that we lack local processing facilities is that USDA regulations are designed for massive, industrial-scale facilities, making it difficult or sometimes even impossible for small-scale facilities to comply. And federal law requires that "state inspected" facilities use the exact same USDA standards, leaving no flexibility for states to work with.

The PRIME Act restores flexibility by repealing the federal ban on the sale of meat from what are known as "custom slaughterhouses." These are facilities that meet state regulations as well as basic federal requirements.ⁱⁱⁱ They are typically very small with few employees. The extensive complicated federal regulations that apply to massive meatpacking facilities are neither needed nor appropriate for these operations, which might process as much meat in an entire year as the large facilities do in a single day. Their small scale also means that they are better able to provide necessary social distancing and sanitation measures while safely continuing operations.

Custom slaughterhouses are already legally operating in numerous states, but the meat from the animals can only go back to – and be consumed by the family of - the person who owned the animal when it entered the slaughterhouse. The meat cannot be sold. A consumer who is not able to pay for and store hundreds of pounds of meat in one order is unable to access the meat from a custom slaughterhouse.

Under current law, a farmer who wants to sell his or her beef, lamb, goat, or pork to consumers, whether at a farm stand, farmers' market, or home delivery, cannot use a custom slaughterhouse.

Instead, the farmer has to haul their animals to a USDA-inspected or equivalent state-inspected facility. These facilities are in short supply, and many farmers must haul long distances at significant cost to reach them, if there is even one accessible. Many of these plants were already at capacity before the current crisis, and many farmers are now being told that they must wait six months or longer to be able to have their animals processed.

The PRIME Act returns control to the states to address the issue of meat processing. States would be able to permit producers to sell meat processed at a custom slaughterhouse within the state. States could choose to impose whatever conditions or limitations that best suited their agricultural, food system, and social conditions.

The PRIME Act could help reduce the severity of the meat shortages and price increases for consumers in the coming months, while providing income for small farmers and ranchers across the country. In the long-term, the PRIME Act can make it feasible for more small processors to be established or expanded, helping with vital infrastructure as we seek to rebuild our economy from this crisis. And it provides long-term environmental benefits by reducing the transportation miles and vehicle emissions from livestock hauling.

H.R. 2859 has 32 sponsors and co-sponsors, from both parties:

Justin Amash (R-MI)	Steve King (R-IA)
Andy Biggs (R-AZ)	Thomas Massie (R-KY)
Ken Buck (R-CO)	Tom McClintock (R-CA)
Ted Budd (R-NC)	Mark Meadows (R-NC)
Tim Burchett (R-TN)	Carol Miller (R-WV)
Joe Courtney (D-CT)	Alexander Mooney (R-WV)
Warren Davidson (R-OH)	Ralph Norman (R-SC)
Rodney Davis (R-IL)	Scott Perry (R-PA)
Jeff Duncan (R-SC)	Chellie Pingree (D-ME)
Matt Gaetz (R-FL)	Chip Roy (R-TX)
John Garamendi (D-CA)	Lloyd Smucker (R-PA)
Louie Gohmert (R-TX)	Darren Soto (D-FL)
Jared Golden (D-ME)	Elise Stefanik (R-NY)
Paul Gosar (R-AZ)	Rashida Tlaib (D-MI)
Mark Green (R-TN)	Robert Wittman (R-VA)
Jared Huffman (D-CA)	Ron Wright (R-TX)

Please join your colleagues in signing on to the PRIME Act and prioritizing its passage. We can provide quality food for Americans, support local economies, and save struggling farmers if you act quickly.

For more information, please contact the Judith McGeary, Executive Director, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org, 512-484-8821, or one of the organizations listed below.

Signed,

National and International Nonprofits

Family Farm Defenders
Farm Aid
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund
Good Meat Project
Healthy Biomes
Holistic Management International
International Rescue Committee
National Family Farm Coalition
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
Organic Consumers Association
OrganicEye
The Permaculture Research Institute USA
R-CALF USA
Rural Coalition
Weston A. Price Foundation
World Farmers

Regional or Statewide Nonprofits

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (AL)
Alaska's Big Village Network (AK)
California Farmers Union (CA)
Community Farm Alliance (KY)
Dakota Rural Action (SD)
Environmental Stewardship (TX)
Fair Farms (MD)
Food for Maine's Future (ME)
Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming (WY)
Kerry Cattle Association (MA)
Missouri Rural Crisis Center (MO)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (VT)
Northwest Farmers Union (OR)
Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
Rural Vermont (VT)
Texas Landowners Council (TX)
Virginia Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (VA)
Western Organization of Resource Councils (MT and multi-state)

Local Nonprofits

Bee Girl (OR)
Double Arrow Ranch & Rescue (CA)

Dragon Soil Health (MA)
Food Policy Council of San Antonio (TX)
GROW North Texas (TX)
Holloway Productions (CO)
HOPE For Small Farm Sustainability (TX)
Nature's Farm Camp (IL)
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc. (OK)
Rondout Valley Growers Association (NY)
SCOR Cardiac Cyclists Club, Inc. (CA)
Slow Food Austin (TX)
Sonoma Family Meal (CA)
Spokane Farmland Preservation Working Group (WA)
Texas Farmers' Market (TX)
Urban Harvest, Inc (TX)
Veterans Farming Initiative (MN)
Waco Downtown Farmers Market (TX)
WAPF - Washington/Ozaukee Counties chapter (WI)

Farms and Ranches

307 Ranch (WY)
4-MAX Ranch (TX)
9 Partners (NY)
A & E Glenden Farms (NY)
Ahbleza Ranch (MO)
American Stonecraft, Inc (MA)
Antelope Mess Inc (CO)
Argyle Acres (ME)
Austin Farms (TN)
B&C Farm (TX)
Ballymena (OR)
Bar JK Land & Cattle (OK)
Bar S Ranch (OK)
Bar T Beef (OK)
Barry Pospichal (NE)
Bayside Gardens (OR)
Beaver Bend Farm, LLC (WA)
Becker Ranch (ND)
Bee Country Honey Farm (TX)
Birch Farm (TX)
Blacksmith Ranch (WY)
Blue Hills Farm (VA)
Blue Line Farm (NY)
Broussard Farms (TX)
Brown Cattle (TX)
Buckrun Biodynamic Garden Healdsburg (CA)
Buhr Ranch (CO)
Capri Cairn Farm (ME)

Castle Argghhh LLC (KS)
Cattle Trail Ranch (MI)
CD&J Mini Ranch (TX)
Chicken Warehouse (UT)
Chrisman Farms Inc. (CA)
Circle J Ranch (TX)
Conley Angus (MO)
Conway's Produce (KS)
Corner Post Meats (CO)
Covadonga Farms (TX)
Covenant Farm Foods (TX)
Crooked Creek Angus (KS)
Crowover Farm (MA)
CS Cattle COmpany (NM)
Cudworth Ranch (ND)
D & V Fleis Ranch (MI)
Dandelion Fields (VA)
Day Herefords (OK)
Deerkreek cattle company (TX)
Diamond Hills Farm (NY)
Diamond Rafter Ranch (TX)
Doctors Clinic of Rio Grande City (TX)
Dostal Ranch (SD)
Double AA Ranch (MT)
Double H Ranch (Lockhart, TX)
Double H Ranch (Nordheim, TX)
Double K Adventures (MO)
Dry Creek Farms LLC (MN)
Earth Friendly Farm (MO)
Eclipse Farm (TX)
Eliason Trucking LLC (SD)
Elmore Farms (TX)
Encina Farms (CA)
Falster Farm (TX)
Fat Hen Farm (OR)
Finca Tres Roblest (TX)
Flatwoods Farm & Micro-Dairy (FL)
Floyd Agricultural Research (TX)
Four Oaks Farm (OK)
Fox Ranch (Hermosa, SD)
Fox Ranch (Belvidere, SD)
French Family Ranch (TX)
Frying Pan Ranch (TX)
Gallino Ranch (NE)
Gantz Ranch (WY)
Glen Haven Farm (TX)
Goat Spirit Farm (ME)
Golden Fleece Farms LLC (MI)

Good Work Farm LLC (PA)
Grabishfarm (CA)
Graciela Abbott (TX)
Granite State Poultry & Processing (NH)
Grass + Grit Farm (NY)
Gray and Brunk (OK)
H(Ranch (NE)
Hames & Axle Farm (MA)
Healing Ponds (OR)
HHH Farm (TX)
High Goose Farm (VT)
Hillbilly Heaven Homestead (TX)
Hines Ranch (TX)
Hollewell Angus Farm (IL)
Hollyhock Farm (WA)
Holm Girls Dairy (WI)
Honey Hog Farm (TX)
Hutchison cattle co (OK)
Hyde Farms (OH)
Hydraulic Supply & Service (TX)
Irish Household (MT)
James E Boree Jr (FL)
Janzen Farms (KS)
Jim Loos Independent Cattle Rancher (TX)
Jobgen Ranch (SD)
Jones Ranch (NE)
JR Livestock (AL)
Juniper Mtn. Land/Livestock (OR)
Kings Little Acres (MA)
Kovac Cattle (LA)
LaidBack Farms (TX)
Larry Trahern (CO)
Larson Farms (ND)
Laura's Garden (WA)
Lazy 9 (CA)
Lazy K Livestock (CO)
Lechtenberg farms (NE)
Lee Farm (TX)
LG Farms (TX)
Living Heritage Farms (WA)
Lloyd Brangus (TX)
Loland Oaks Farm (MA)
Lotus Hill (FL)
Luchetti Ranch Partnership (CA)
Maher JM Angus (ND)
Marsh Mellow Meadows (LA)
McGeary Family Farm (TX)
Meadowhead on Cedar (MA)

Mertz ranch (ND)
Mesa Farm (UT)
Mesteño Draw Ranch (NM)
Midwest Elderberry Cooperative (MN)
Mike Schultz Ranch (ND)
Mini Moo Cows Farm (TX)
Misty River View (MA)
Morning Star Farms (MO)
Munkebo Farm (TX)
NLazyH Ranch (NE)
Northfork Ranch (OK)
Novelty Farm (MO)
Nowell's Naturals (TX)
Oakley Livestock Commission Co (KS)
Oatmeal Oaks Ranch (TX)
On the Hook Acres (MO)
Otero Family Farm (NY)
Paitz Farm Service (NE)
Pipe Dream Farms (TN)
Quarter Moon Farm (TX)
R&F Farms (TX)
Ramble Creek Farm (NY)
Rambling Rose Farms (TX)
Rascoe Pecans (TX)
Reditus Natural Farming, LLC (ID)
Ric McConnell (FL)
Robinson Farms (MO)
Rockin' E Ranch (TX)
RockinBarB Ranch (TX)
Rockland Farm (MA)
Rockn-H-Ranch (KS)
Rogers Ranch (MO)
Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC (MN)
Saga Farms (TX)
Sanglier Home Ranch (CA)
Savage Acres (VA)
Serenity Farm (TX)
Serenity Holistic Farm (TX)
Seven Mill Iron Ranch (NE)
Seven Springs Farm (VA)
Shawnee Creek Farm (TX)
Shelter Mountain Farm (NC)
Shimar farms (MD)
Six Pack Farm and Cattle LKC (CO)
SM Brown Ranch (TX)
Solace Farm (TN)
Solar Acres (TX)
Sosoni Farm LLC (CO)

South Austin Micro Farm (TX)
Spanial Ranch (TX)
Spring Gulch Farm (CA)
Stratton's Custom Meats & Smokehouse,LLC (NY)
Sun Ranch (KS)
Sunnyhill Farm (KY)
Swain Family Farm (CA)
Sweet Eats Fruit Farm (TX)
The Double Portion Ranch (TX)
The Family Cow, LLC (PA)
The Golden Hoof (CO)
The Pauper's Cottage Family Farmstead (TX)
Tir Bluen (TX)
Trahern Ranch (CO)
Traynor Family Farm (MI)
Tregellys Farm (MA)
TSK Farms LLC (NE)
T-Squared Farm (TX)
U7 Ranch (NE)
Uncle Tim's Farm (TN)
Unwin Family Ranch (CO)
Utility Research Garden llc (TX)
V5 Farms, LLC (AZ)
Valley View Devons (NY)
Via-Tality Farms (VA)
WATE Ranches LLC (NM)
Waterman Orchards (VT)
Wellas Cattle Co. (NE)
Wheat/Barley farm-Sherman County (OR)
Wild Creek Farm LLC (TX)
Wildwood Farm (MA)
Windfair Farm (MO)
Withywindle Farm (Portland, OR)
Withywindle Farm (Newberg, OR)
Yahweh's All Natural Farm and Garden (TX)

ⁱ Heffernan, W. & Hendrickson, M. (2007). Concentration of agricultural markets. University of Missouri, Department of Rural Sociology. Posted online at <http://www.foodcircles.missouri.edu/07contable.pdf>

ⁱⁱ GRACE Communications Foundation. Food Processing & Slaughterhouses. 2015. Quoting Schlosser, E. (2002). Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company. Posted online at <http://www.sustainabletable.org/279/food-processing-slaughterhouses>

ⁱⁱⁱ 9 C.F.R. 303.1(a)(2)