



**Testimony of Behalf of the University of Maine System Presented by Dr. Jason Bolton, Associate Dean of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension
In Support of LD 1767, *An Act to Develop and Provide Technical Assistance for Meat Slaughtering and Processing* – May 1, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry: My name is Dr. Jason Bolton, and I am the Associate Dean of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. On behalf of the University of Maine System (UMS) and UMaine Extension, I am testifying in support of LD 1767, which would expand our existing efforts to serve Maine's farmers and meat producers and processors.

Since 2010, UMaine Extension has supported the meat and poultry processing industry with guidance and USDA-mandated Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) education. For example, you may recall that during the pandemic, we worked with the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) Maine Meat and Poultry Inspection program to provide food safety plan coordination and review that allowed three rural processors in Aroostook, Penobscot and Washington counties to come on-line, easing the processing bottleneck and ensuring more Mainers had access to healthy and safe local meat.

In my previous role as the UMaine Extension statewide food safety specialist, I supported all areas of commercial food safety and manufacturing, including but not limited to seafood, meat and poultry, beverages, and fruit and vegetable processing. With my recent promotion to Associate Dean, we are no longer able to offer meat and poultry HACCP education. To better meet the growing needs of the food processing sector in the state, UMaine would like to hire a seafood and meat and poultry specialist. However, we would likely need additional financial resources (as proposed by this bill) to recruit professionals and support the growing demand for specialized meat and poultry processing education and technical assistance.

In 2017, UMaine Extension further added meat-cutting education to our catalog of programs assisting this growing industry, and demand for related courses has remained high, consistently reaching capacity within hours of opening registration. Because UMaine lacks faculty with specific expertise in meat processing, we currently rely on contractual services from a meat science specialist from the University of Kentucky, which limits the frequency we can offer this type of training and stifles the development of new programs to support meat processing workforce development.

Funding provided by LD 1767 would support the hiring of a UMaine Extension meat science faculty member devoted entirely to meat processing education and workforce development to help further strengthen and grow Maine's meat industry and rural-dependent jobs. Proposed

meat processing training and support in both online and in-person modalities we could undertake include meat and poultry HACCP, meat cutting, meat processing, slaughter practices and facility design.

We appreciate that Representative Cluchey has worked with UMaine Extension and DACF to understand the challenges and opportunities for Maine meat and poultry industry, which has led to this legislation that builds on past work with this Committee and stakeholders.

To grow meat and poultry processing capacity in Maine, crucial production, cost and marketing data must be collected. LD 1767 would additionally provide funding to support a comprehensive feasibility study led by UMaine faculty experts in economics, marketing, innovation and entrepreneurship/small business. The research team assembled by UMaine is uniquely positioned to lead this study. The feasibility study would provide clear guidance for business decisions, future policy and investment.

Their initial analysis revealed a deficiency of information available to make important decisions to sustain and grow local meat production. Based on similar feasibility studies performed by other states and universities, the appropriations requested for this study reflect the following essential labor-intensive components:

- *Identification of understanding of financial, physical, regulatory, marketing and cultural barriers to increasing meat and poultry slaughter and processing in the state.*
- *Current numbers of locally-produced (within Maine) livestock and processing capacity.*
- *The startup cost of the facilities and ongoing operations.*
- *Marketing considerations for product pricing, consumer demand and consumer education.*

UMaine's long history of supporting and growing the food industry through education and research uniquely positions us to provide these resources and build a more resilient meat and poultry processing workforce and sector. We look forward to undertaking this important work with your support.

Thank you for your continued commitment to UMaine Extension and to Maine's public universities.