

May 15, 2023

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen and Rep. Pluecker and members of the Agricultural Conservation and Forestry Committee.

I am Barry Higgins of Maple Lane Farms in Charleston; I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1916.

We have had a state inspected slaughter and processing plant in Charleston since 2006.

We are currently slaughtering and processing 1600 beef, 1800 pigs and 500 lambs and goats annually.

We are fully booked for the fall and winter of 2023 and 2024.

We have several Maine farms that depend on us to slaughter, process and privately label inspected livestock for them to supply their customers.

We also do several hundred animals for our own farm. We also employ 24 local people in our area.

As you already know the red meat and poultry inspection for the state of Maine is supposed to be equal to or higher than the USDA program. The Federal program does not have any weather-related days off. In talking to a friend who owns a Federal Inspected Plant in Bangor (W.A Bean), I questioned him asking him if they had cancelled days off during bad weather? He replied, "might be 15 minutes late but don't remember losing a whole day."

Four days during the 2022 - 2023 season we were not able to operate because the inspector could not come to work because the Governor cancelled all nonessential employees from working the following day, because of a projected weather event.

What happens at Maple Lane Farms when no inspector is on the premises?

We are unable to slaughter and process any inspected animal that is processed for retail, which is approximately 75% of our production.

We how ever can do custom or uninspected animals.

So, if the inspectors are not allowed to work and we do not have custom meat to slaughter or process we must shut down the facility for that day.

When you are fully booked and already working overtime to take care of our wholesale and retail accounts there is no time to not operate. We have stores, restaurants, schools, farmers, and employees that have to be rescheduled, and there is no chance for rescheduling.

So, to sum it up I have come here today to give you a small snapshot of what happens when we get cancelled, and often when the weather doesn't turn out to be that bad.

We do not have the infrastructure in the state of Maine to get animals slaughtered and process them in a timely manner. We shouldn't lose inspection time during minor weather events. So, I am asking for your support in deeming Maine Meat Inspectors as essential employees to support the meat industry in the state of Maine.

I would be happy to answer any of your questions.

Thank you for your time.

Barry Higgins

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