



Findings and Recommendations for Supporting Meat Slaughtering and Processing in Maine Pursuant to L.D. 493

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LD 493 Request

LD 493, An Act To Allow Custom Slaughterhouses to Produce Cuts of Meat to Be Sold Commercially in the State, was carried forward from last session.

In the interim, the ACF Committee requested DACF to convene a working group to discuss meat processing bottlenecks -- including the urgent need for more meat processing in the state to meet intense demand, more inspectors, additional financial support, and increasing the labor force.

LD 493 Process

- Two listening sessions with inspected and custom processors
- Consultations with UMCE
- Infrastructure Needs Survey
- Outreach to Dept. of Labor, Dept. of Corrections, Maine Community College System
- Submittal of joint DACF-UMCE grant for meat processing feasibility study
- Outreach to processors re USDA Meat and Poultry Inspection Readiness Grants (7 funded)

- Requesting additional MMPI inspection support in supplemental budget
- Outreach to other states re skills training
- Ongoing review of USDA funding opportunities
- Launch of Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program
- Creation of new Variance Committee to allow retail operations to expand into smoked/cured meat production.

Themes and Issues

- Lack of labor is the most pressing issue facing processors. Skills training is needed to build a sustainable labor force.
- Infrastructure investments are needed to enhance existing plants and start new plants, particularly in locations across the state that currently lack processing resources.
- Business planning and training is needed to help plants navigate slower periods of business.
- Education is needed for livestock producers, especially new producers, to better understand animal readiness for processing.
- More inspectors are needed in the DACF's MMPI program.

Maine's current meat and poultry processing landscape

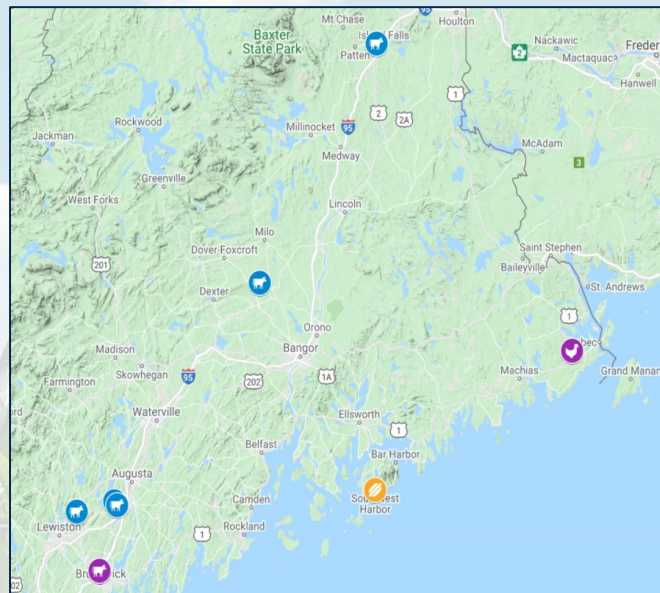
- MMPI: Eight State-inspected facilities; 44 custom slaughterhouses and processors and 60 poultry operators.
- Eight State-inspected facilities = half of the state's total inspected red meat slaughter capacity and half of the inspected poultry capacity.

- MMPI-inspected facilities output:
- FY 2020 – 1.5 million lbs. red meat; 33,000 processed poultry birds (43% and 74% increase over FY 19)
- FY 2021 – 1.4 million lbs. red meat; 46,000 processed poultry birds

Maine's current meat and poultry processing landscape, cont'd.

- Simply put: There are not enough inspected slaughterhouses in the state to slaughter and process the number of animals that Maine producers wish to raise.
- USDA and State facilities were overcapacity pre-pandemic. Made worse by COVID-19 supply chain disruptions.
- Producers making appointments for processing at many months or even years in advance.

Current State-inspected facilities



2020-2022 Activities

- DACF outreach to processors to understand resource constraints in light of growing local demand.
- DACF awarded \$904,000 in CARES Act Agriculture & Food Infrastructure Reimbursement Program funding to meat processors.
- Heritage Industry Survey confirms interest in expanded on-site storage, increased processing capacity, and increased packaging capacity.
- UMaine School of Economics study: a 50% increase in meat processing in Maine would result in a total of \$15.3 million in sales, 74 jobs, and \$2.9 million in labor income.
- USDA Meat and Poultry Inspection Readiness Grant awarded \$1.14 million to seven applicants.



2020-2022 Activities, cont'd

- DACF's Agriculture Infrastructure Investment Program currently open (~\$19 million). Meat and poultry processing improvements and infrastructure investments will be eligible.
- New DACF Variance Committee will review variance requests from the Maine Food Code to allow retail operations to expand into smoked/cured meat production. Expansion of retailers' capability to produce these products will ease bottlenecks on smoking/curing operations at USDA and State Inspected facilities.
- \$1 billion in American Rescue Plan funds to USDA for expansion of independent processing capacity in meat and poultry processing. 2022 USDA's Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program, etc.
- In 2021, a new permanent MMPI inspector position and a new permanent Inspection Process Analyst position were authorized by the Legislature.



Listening Session

- 2 virtual listening sessions.
- The most often cited bottleneck for meat processing in the state was the lack of an available labor force. Skills training needed.
- Costs of doing business rising and can't keep pace.
- Significant infrastructure investments are needed: more slaughter capacity, larger facilities, more inspectors.
- Seasonality of the business can be challenging.
- Business assistance needed (ex: scheduling).
- Livestock producers, esp. new, need training (appropriate weights, etc.)



Hatch's Custom Meat Cutting

Labor Discussions: ME DOL

- Maine DOL: new grant program for employers to apply for funding to create apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs for their businesses. Grants open now.
- Industry Partnerships Initiative to identify shared workforce development needs related to recruitment, training, and education, retaining and advancing workers, and develop solutions.
- Long-standing “Maine Apprenticeship Program.”
- Job fairs at correctional facilities (pre-pandemic).
- Maine Worker Opportunity Tax Credit Program currently exists, allowing employers to receive Federal income tax credits for their companies should they hire ex-felons within one year of release.
- DACF to promote these new and existing programs/resources to processors.

Labor Discussions: ME DOC, MCC

- Maine DOC: a meat processing work-release program could be explored from Bolduc, Charleston and Southern Maine Women's Reentry facilities. Transportation necessary by an outside party.
- Potentially outfit existing correction facilities to allow for meat processing training to occur on-site (already have large commercial kitchens and cold storage capacity). MMPI to visit.
- MCC: review potential to develop appropriate curriculum for DOC and MCC. Assess other states' vocational programs (OK, MN). Certificate program for DOC and within existing MCC culinary training?
- Agreed to form an exploratory committee that will continue to meet regularly and further develop these ideas.



Hatch's Custom Meat Cutting

Labor Discussions: UMCE

- Courses: Sanitation Training; Meat and Poultry; and Meat Cutting School
- The Meat and Poultry course requires 16 hours of instruction and hands-on development of a HACCP plan at a cost of \$275 and includes the sanitation course.
- The Meat Cutting School currently includes 35+ hours of contact lectures and hands-on training and costs \$450 (online training in process - \$75-\$125).
- Dr. Matthew Highlands Pilot Plant is a registered custom meat processing facility. This typically allows UMCE to offer the meat cutting school with hands-on training to a large group of participants over the course of five days.
- Those that complete sanitation, meat cutting, and/or HACCP trainings and “on the job” application of these skills can receive level one, two, three and/or the complete Food Safety badge signifying high competencies in these skills.

Recommendation 1: Skills Training

- DACF creates an Exploratory Committee for workforce training strategies. Maine Department of Labor, the Maine Department of Corrections, the Maine Community College System, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and processors.
- Strategies may include a work-release program, the creation of a community college curriculum and certificate program in meat cutting, train-the-trainer modules, and possible funding for mobile training and processing units similar to other states.
- Report to the 131st legislature.



Recommendation 2: UMCE HACCP Position

- Allocate funding to the Department to underwrite a new permanent position at UMCE.
- Responsible for assisting with the development and writing of HACCP food safety plans for meat and poultry processors as well as seafood processors.
- Drafting of these plans is a time-consuming and rigorous process, so this service would alleviate a considerable hurdle to the meat inspection process in Maine.
- Approximately \$105,000/annually.



Recommendation 3: Support additional MMPI staffing

- DACF's Supplemental Budget request includes making a current MMPI limited-term inspector position permanent and adding one new permanent MMPI position to the program.
- The seven recipients of 2021 USDA Meat and Poultry Inspection Readiness Grants include three new inspected slaughter and processing facilities. MMPI must be ready to keep up with new and increasing demand for inspection services.

Recommendation 4: Support funding for Maine-specific feasibility study

- \$100,000 to support a Maine-specific feasibility study conducted by the University of Maine or other Maine academic institution.
- Identify the financial, physical, regulatory, and cultural barriers to increased red meat and poultry slaughter and processing in the state.
- Model three different theoretical red meat or poultry slaughter and processing operations in three geographically and economically diverse areas of Maine.
- This study will provide important financial, regulatory, and technical information to potential investors in new or existing processing facilities in the state.

Recommendation 5: UMCE build out animal finishing standards training

- DACF recommends that UMCE build out its current training capacity and outreach regarding animal finishing standards (i.e., livestock best practices leading to successful slaughter/processing) to include county extension agents.
- DACF will partner with UMCE to help support these efforts financially.





Thank you
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