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March 22, 2022

Chair Mike Sundin
House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Mike Sundin and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share our strong support for Rep. Anderson's bill to help K12 career and technical programs introduce students to meat cutting (HF4057). The bottleneck in processing continues to be a challenge for our family farmer members as they work to expand their operations and meet local demand. This investment—in particular when coupled with others discussed by your committee—will help rebuild a local processing industry that better serves family farmers.

MFU is a grassroots general farm organization that has represented family farmers and rural communities since 1918. Meat cutting grants for K12 career and technical programs will complement existing vocational programs, like small engines, welding, and construction, in introducing secondary students to meat processing. Much like in agriculture more broadly, many processors are approaching retirement and thinking about the generational transition of their businesses. This investment will not only help address a workforce shortage in the industry, but also inspire a next generation of small business owners who will take over existing plants.

Building on a successful pilot at West Central Area schools, this new competitive grant program will help secondary schools purchase supplies and equipment, do limited renovations, and gain professional development needed to stand up meat cutting courses. This investment is well-timed, because secondary schools will be able to rely on Central Lakes and Ridgewater Colleges—both of which are starting meat cutting programs in fall of 2022—for training educators. Secondary courses will also provide a pathway for students to enroll in the college programs.

Finally, it is important to note that this is not the only investment needed to support small processors. We also strongly support direct support for Central Lakes and Ridgewater, investing the AGRI Value Added program to expand processing capacity, and helping processors with worker recruitment and retention. Each is an important piece of rebuilding an industry that farmers rely on to get their products to market.

Thank you to your committee for your strong support of local processing. We believe these investments are central to building a food system that is more distributed, fair, and secure. If you have any questions, please contact our Government Relations Director, Stu Lourey, at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-2047 (C). Thank you for considering the needs and perspectives of Minnesota's farm families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Wertish". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "G" and "W".

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union