

# Meat Messenger

North Dakota State Meat Inspection Program

North Dakota Department of Agriculture

October 2006

## **Maple Valley Locker Newest Inspected Plant**

By Laura White

Maple Valley Locker in Enderlin is anticipating the upcoming hunting season as the second generation family-owned business booms this time of year. With over 35 years in business, Kevin Hartl is ready for the season.

Maple Valley Locker is one of the newest plants to join the State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program. They came under state inspection in March. “We are very happy we came under North Dakota inspection,” states Hartl. “The inspection was definitely a plus and opened doors for us.” Maple Valley has processed nearly 200 head under inspection.

Maple Valley Locker currently employs 12 people; but with the upcoming hunting season, he will have up to 25 employees in the plant. Game processing is a large part of the business. Hartl’s retail offerings include fresh cut meats and up to 40 varieties of sausage, roasts and other products. Catering is also available. Maple Valley offers meat and cheese trays, salads, and platters.

The plant would like to try on-line sales at some time. Maple Valley Locker currently has a website with information on rates, catering, and contact information.

In addition to Maple Valley Locker, 14 other meat processing companies are now state inspected including: Bridgemart Meats, Wyndmere; Barton Meats, Carrington; Butcher Block, Oakes; DeVore Custom Meats, Steele; Edgeley Custom Meats, Edgeley; Erickson’s Meat Market, Bowman; Garrison Custom Meats, Garrison; Hickory Hut, Langdon; L & M Meats and Sausage, Grand Forks; Siouxland Buffalo, Grand Forks; Wildrose Grocery, Wildrose; The Wurst Shop, Dickinson; and Country Cuisine, Leeds.

For more information on the State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program, call (701) 328-2231 or (800) 242-7535.

## **Congressman Blunt Introduces Measure Opening Interstate Markets to State Inspected Meats**

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Washington, D.C. – Southwest Missouri Congressman Roy Blunt with 13 original cosponsors today introduced the “New Markets for State-Inspected Meat and Poultry Act of 2006” (H.R. 6130). The bill would allow interstate sales of state-inspected meat and poultry products. It is similar to legislation (S. 3519) introduced in the Senate by Sen. Orrin Hatch (UT).

The 13 cosponsors of H.R. 6130 are: Reps. Earl Pomeroy (ND), Tammy Baldwin (WI), Michael Conaway (TX), Stephanie Herseth (SD), Frank Lucas (OK), David Obey (WI), John Salazar (CO), Shelley Moore Capito (WV), Barbara Cubin (WY), Steve King (IA), Jerry Moran (KS), and James Sensenbrenner (WI).

Congressman Blunt said, “There are 2,000 state-inspected meat processors—31 of them in Missouri—that are prevented from competing in the national marketplace. Yet, 30 foreign meat producing countries can sell their meats freely across the nation. Our locally produced, state-inspected meats are just as safe. In fairness, this measure will promote the local livestock sector of agriculture without compromising food safety that consumers demand.”



## Meat Messenger

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## New Inspector Covering South-Central Territory

By Dr. Andrea Grondahl

Cody Kreft joined the State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program (NDMPIP) June 6, 2006. Cody grew up NW of Streeter, ND, and graduated from Gackle-Streeter High School. Throughout this time Cody was actively involved with 4-H, FFA, sports, and helping out on the farm. After attending NDSU for 4 years, Cody graduated with a bachelor's degree in Animal and Range Science. Cody has worked in different aspects of the animal agriculture business including: NDSU cow/calf research centers in Streeter and Fargo, Sinner Bros. and Bresnahan feedlot in Casselton, and his family's club calf enterprise.

Cody speaks highly of his past experiences as well as his current position, "Having these different experiences has enabled me to see how everyone works together for a common goal. Working for NDMPIP and working with local businesses to help market more of our home grown products, right here in North Dakota, has proven to be a rewarding experience."

## Sportsmen Against Hunger

By Ann Pollert

### *The history of this project*

In 2004, the North Dakota Community Action Association (NDCAA) initiated a public education campaign to encourage local community sporting groups to develop a venison donation program. This campaign was initiated due to the statewide problem of hunger.

The North Dakota Community Action Association applied for and received the Community Food and Nutrition Grant, which was used to make brochures and posters for their public education campaign. Their main focus was to educate statewide hunting groups, smaller local hunting organizations and meat processors about the Sportsmen Against Hunger Program and to encourage them to come up with fundraisers to support the program. Presentations were also given state wide to promote the program.

With the help of local organized groups and area processors, Sportsmen Against Hunger has a successful first year. **In 2004, with only 3 of the 8 regions of the state involved, 115 processed deer were donated to the food pantries because of this program.**

### *A look at 2005*

With much thanks to the generosity of the clubs, the Community Food Nutrition grant and the processors were able to expand the Sportsmen Against Hunger Program in 2005. We added some new areas and now have processors in 6 of the 8 regions throughout North Dakota. **We are proud that through this program and all the support from other organizations, Sportsman Against Hunger processed 241 deer this year.** The venison was distributed to numerous food pantries across the state. Again we thank everyone for the contributions and support of the program and are looking forward to beginning to plan next year's Sportsmen Against Hunger Program.

For more information about this program or to get involved contact Ann Pollert at 1-800-726-7960.

# Agriculture Small Business Opportunity and Enhancement Act of 2006 - S. 3519

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## **Why S. 3519 Is Needed**

**Current law restricts free markets.** The 1967 and 1968 Meat and Poultry Inspection Acts prohibit state-inspected products (beef, poultry, pork, lamb, and goat) from being sold in interstate commerce. However, the prohibition does not apply to “non-amenable” products—such as venison, pheasant, quail, rabbit, alligator and a host of others. These products are normally regulated by state inspection programs, yet can be shipped in interstate commerce without restriction. It does not make sense to allow these products across state borders while beef, pork, lamb and goat cannot be shipped interstate.

State-inspected meat and poultry are the *only* commodities that are restricted from sale across state lines. Other commodities, such as milk, dairy products, fruit, vegetables, fish, shellfish, and complex canned products, which are inspected under state jurisdiction, are allowed to be marketed freely throughout the U.S.

**Current law penalizes small business.** Twenty-eight states currently have their own meat and poultry inspection programs serving about 2,000 small or very small establishments. Most of the state-inspected meat plants are owned and operated by small business owners. Without change, growing concentration in the processing sector will continue to leave smaller farmers and ranchers with fewer buyers for their livestock and poultry.

**Current law discriminates against U.S. products.** Foreign-inspected products can be shipped to and sold anywhere in the United States as long as that country’s foreign inspection program is equivalent to U.S. standards—in practice the same standards which state-inspected programs must meet. Small businesses in the U.S. are denied opportunities that are given to companies in foreign countries.

**Current law is outdated.** State and federal inspection programs should function together as a seamless system in both intrastate *and* interstate commerce. State meat and poultry inspection programs must equal or exceed the level of food safety for the federal inspection program. Interstate shipment legislation would further improve food safety by creating a more uniform system and increasing consumer confidence.

## **What S.3519 Would Do**

S. 3519 will resolve a basic issue of inequity which has existed since 1967 and allow interstate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry products. Removing the current ban on interstate shipment will create a more uniform inspection system and further enhance food safety and consumer confidence in the food supply. S. 3519 will level the economic playing field for small businesses and spur more competition and innovation in the marketplace. Increased markets will stimulate small business sales, expand rural development and increase local tax bases—all of which will benefit farmers, ranchers, processors, related industries and consumers.

## **Bill Summary**

The key objectives of S. 3519 is to: (1) ensure that all meat and poultry products are inspected under a seamless national inspection system enforcing a consistent set of requirements; and (2) eliminate the prohibition on interstate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry products.

- S.3519 would authorize state meat and poultry inspection programs to enforce federal inspection requirements under new cooperative agreements with USDA.
- Products inspected under the new system would be eligible for interstate shipment, export, and use in products destined for export.

# Background & History

## On State Meat and Poultry Inspection Programs

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### Inspection Program Basics

The 1967 and 1968 Acts stressed the need for cooperation between state and federal authorities, and gave USDA clear responsibility for setting a national standard for meat and poultry inspection. USDA is required to monitor state programs and to assume direct responsibility at state plants if a state fails to develop or effectively enforce inspection requirements “at least equal to” those under the federal acts.

USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) annually certifies that each state inspection program is “at least equal to” federal inspection requirements. This is verified by an FSIS review of each state’s self-assessment attesting to program compliance along with supporting documentation and results of comprehensive reviews of state inspection programs.

Today, there are no real distinctions between state and federal inspection requirements. In fact, many states impose inspection requirements more stringent than USDA. FSIS has been conducting these “equal to” reviews since passage of the Acts in 1967 and 1968. Since that time, the agency has *never* unilaterally found that a state inspection program should be discontinued due to inadequacies in its inspection program.

### Oversight and Review

USDA is required by law to monitor state programs and to assume direct responsibility at state plants if a state fails to develop or effectively enforce inspection requirements that are “at least equal to” federal requirements. FSIS Directive 5720.2 Revision 3 provides a detailed oversight and review strategy composed of two parts.

First, FSIS provides the Directors of state cooperative inspection programs with a copy of the *FSIS Manual for State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program Reviews* which includes a Self-Assessment instrument. To be deemed “at least equal-to” the federal program, a state program must address all components included in the self-assessment and submit the completed form, with all supporting documentation, to the FSIS Review Staff Director along with a signed *Certificate of Program Compliance*. Each state program must submit an annual update of the self-assessment to FSIS on or before November 15<sup>th</sup> of each year.

Second, FSIS will conduct a review of the state’s inspection program. This review consists of an FSIS verification of the state’s self-assessment instrument, and supporting documentation, followed by an on-site review of the state program. The FSIS review team conducts on-site audits by reviewing the state offices and a sample of state meat and poultry plants to verify the state program is operating as described by the self-assessment document. This process may require several weeks to complete. After reviewing the results, FSIS will certify that the state’s cooperative inspection program either meets or does not meet the “at least equal-to” requirements.

### Interstate Shipment

The 1967 and 1968 Meat and Poultry Inspection Acts prohibit state-inspected products (beef, poultry, pork, lamb and goat) from being sold in interstate commerce. However, the prohibition does not apply to “non-amenable” products—such as venison, pheasant, quail, rabbit, alligator and a host of others. With the exception of voluntary inspection offered by FSIS for a fee, these products are normally regulated by the state inspection programs yet, can be shipped in interstate commerce without restriction.

State-inspected meat and poultry are the *only* commodities that are restricted from sale across state lines. Other commodities, such as milk, dairy products, fruit, vegetables, fish, shellfish, and complex canned products, which are inspected under state jurisdiction, are allowed to be marketed freely throughout the U.S.

Legislation to allow interstate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry products has been introduced and debated in Congress for more than a decade.

## Development of a Risk-Based Inspection System

In the 1980's and 1990's there was much debate about whether the meat and poultry inspection programs, which were first designed in the early 1900's, had kept pace with changes in the food production and marketing industries, and with perceived hazards—whether naturally occurring or intentionally caused by human intervention.

Traditional inspection under the original meat and poultry statutes provided constant organoleptic inspection (sight-smell-touch) at slaughter operations and daily inspection of sample products and operations at processing plants. In the early 1990's, food safety officials recognized that most food borne illness traced to meat and poultry products were caused by naturally occurring microbiological contamination that was not adequately addressed by the traditional sight-smell-touch-based system of inspection. Thus, USDA began to add testing for pathogenic bacteria on various species and products to the inspection system. This “modernization” of the meat and poultry inspection system was based on the principles of reducing the “risks” of food borne disease to consumers. In order to maintain “equal to” status, state programs have been required to enact these same measures.

## Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points (HACCP) System

In 1996, USDA finalized a sweeping new risk reduction system called Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP). Under this system, meat processing establishments must analyze risks in each phase of production, identifying and then monitoring “critical control points” for preventing such hazards, and taking corrective actions when necessary. Record keeping and verification are used to ensure that the system is working. Since January 2000, all slaughter and processing operations are required to have HACCP plans in place. HACCP is intended to operate as an additional measure of safety to the traditional methods of inspection, which are still mandatory under the original statutes.

Under HACCP regulations, all operations must have site-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) for sanitation. State or federal inspectors check records to verify a plant's compliance. The HACCP rule also mandates two types of microbial testing: for generic *E. Coli* and for *Salmonella*. Test results help FSIS inspectors verify that plant sanitation procedures are working, and to identify and assist plants whose process control may be under performing.

## Additional Regulatory Safeguards

Important federal regulatory programs have been effectively applied in recent years to improve all segments of the Nation's extensive food safety system, including food production and distribution chain, animal and plant husbandry, production, transportation, and preparation.

Under the risk-based HACCP system, FSIS now has years of food safety testing/verification data that provides timely information to both consumers and industry. USDA continues to develop additional strategies and approaches to address new hazards, technology improvements, and scientific advances. Other initiatives being implemented in the federal food safety inspection system are outlined below. **It is important to remember that in order to maintain “equal to” status, state programs have been required to enact these same measures.**

In October 1994, FSIS began testing samples of raw ground beef for *E. coli* O157:H7 and declared that any such product found with this pathogen would be considered adulterated — the first time a foodborne pathogen on raw product was declared an adulterant under the meat inspection law. In October 2002 the agency published a notice requiring manufacturers of all raw beef products to reassess their HACCP plans and add control points for *E. coli* O157:H7 if the reassessment showed that the pathogen was a likely hazard in the facility's operations. The changes at all operations were required to be complete by April 2003.

In June 2003, FSIS announced an interim final rule to reduce *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Lm*) in ready-to-eat (RTE) meats (e.g. cold cuts and hot dogs). The new regulation requires plants that process RTE foods to add control measures specific to *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Lm*) to their HACCP and sanitation plans, and to verify their effectiveness by testing and disclosing the results to FSIS. The rule directs FSIS inspectors to conduct random tests to verify establishments' programs. Plants are subject to different degrees of FSIS verification testing depending upon what type of control steps they adopt in their HACCP and sanitation plans.

## **Demand for State Meat Inspection Service Continues to Grow**

**By Dr. Andrea Grondahl**

During the first year after the State Meat Inspection Program was implemented (October, 2000) by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture (Department), two meat processing plants joined the program as “Official State Establishments” or “State-Inspected”. In the second year the number of official state establishments increased to ten plants. Since then the program has continued to grow, and more plants continue to express interest in attaining state inspection.

Before the middle of the current biennium (July 2005 – June 2007) the program experienced demand beyond what could be provided with allotted resources. The demand for service has not only been new plants but also existing official establishments that want to expand their volume. In response to this demand, the Department filed a request with the state Emergency Commission in March 2006 to hire and fund an additional full time employee. The request was granted and the position was filled in June 2006. This experience has demonstrated the need to keep ahead of the demand rather than risking lagging behind and limiting potential growth of the meat processing industry.

The Department has submitted a budget to the ND Office of Management and Budget requesting a large enhancement for the meat inspection program. The enhancement includes five additional Full Time Employees (FTEs), which includes on-site inspectors as well as additional support staff. These positions are necessary to keep up with the expected demand for service and will only be filled when or if these expectations are met.

During the upcoming legislative session, which convenes in January, 2007, the Department will argue in favor of the enhancement and hopefully will be successful. However, it is important that legislators know that the industry is also supportive of the program and the ability to provide inspection service to additional plants. If this is important to you, be sure you talk to your local legislators prior to the session and let them know you are in support of the enhancement.

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