

Re: H. 603 bill

Let me begin by clearly stating that I am not in support of this bill as it's being presented at this time. Please continue to read until the end. I apologize for it's length but I feel very strongly about this bill, evidenced in part by the fact that you are getting this letter at all. My usual tactic with politics is just learn to live with whatever the outcome is!

I've been able to watch some of the testimony. (presented to the House Ag Committee) I can't say that I've seen it all, but I do believe I've watched most of it.

Let me also just say that we did on farm custom slaughter (for hire) in the '80's and early '90's, primarily of red meat but some chickens and turkeys. Most of the chickens and turkeys we did were our own.

In the early 2000's we started growing broilers with another couple just for our use and theirs. We grew 2 flocks of 50 birds the first year or two and then increased to 2 flocks of 75, because we were all eating more chicken and our dinner guests and family were asking if they could buy some. That demand increased our flocks to 2 flocks of 100 or 125. At some point in there we started having complete strangers stop by the house, our farm at that time was just a little coop in our backyard. No roadside signs, no social media promotion, just word of mouth and folks liking how our chicken tasted. Once we lost the friend of a friend connection, we (possibly I) decided we were either going to stop selling entirely or we were going to become a registered business. When we first started raising chickens with our friends we hired a local guy to do the slaughter for/with us, because he had the equipment! (I'll add here that I had him bring his equipment to me the night before slaughter and I washed it myself with hot soapy water and rinsed it with bleach!) As we got bigger, he was considering getting out of poultry slaughter, so we started figuring out how I could do small batch slaughter by myself and what equipment I would need and cost and where on our property we could put a "windbreak and roof" so I could do it regardless of weather. Weather mattered for a few reasons. 1) the scalding water was heated with a propane fired "turkey fryer", 2) the plucker is electric I wasn't wanting to stand in the rain and play with electricity 3) hot days in the sun didn't allow the chickens to cool as fast as I would like in the ice bath. 4) I needed a protected, clean place to store and open the ice bags to add it as needed to the ice bath 5) my spot also needed to have potable water and electricity. Eventually, it occurred to us that we had a small building on the property that already had all those things that we could convert into the broiler barn and put the slaughter shed lean to on the side of it! So we cleared out the stuff we had stored in there and as the building of the lean to got closer we thought well building another wall so it was completely enclosed wasn't going to cost a whole lot more. When the build was pretty close to complete, we learned from a friend that a state meat inspector was coming to look at a facility in a nearby town, so I reached out to them, (the state) and asked if they could come do a walk through at our place in case we ever decided to go under inspection. He came, he saw, he was impressed at how much effort we had put into BUT to come under inspection we would have to do a few things and a little paperwork. The construction changes that we needed were minimal and made sense for flow and cleanliness even if we never opted to go under inspection! We decided almost immediately that the benefits of inspection were worth it for us. So we requested the paperwork and with their help, including now Section Chief Julie Boisvert, we got the paperwork all done and came under state inspection in 2017 and under CIS in 2022. We had our label approved prior to going under inspection. We have an on farm CIS inspected slaughterhouse and processing plant. Our

first year under inspection, we slaughtered only in the warm months and did a total of 650 birds or so. Then on Halloween day 2017 we got a call from a butcher shop that wanted 100 fresh birds per week all year round! So we took out a loan and built our first addition on the barn, insulated the old and the new and installed a heating system. They bought birds from us until July of 2023 when they got flooded. In 2023 we raised 13,000 chickens. Most of those are sold in cuts (USDA calls them parts but I prefer cuts) many are sold as whole birds. I don't track how many of each anymore.

In listening to the testimony I heard a lot about how much more money each of these farmers thought they could make by selling exempt poultry cuts. I didn't hear very much about procedures, chilling, water testing, humane handling, sanitization, storing, packaging and even packaging storage.

Under inspection we are REQUIRED to do/have the following~

1) Paperwork

- a) HACCP Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point plan
- b) SOP Standard Operating Procedures plan
- c) SOPP Standard Operating Policies and Procedures plan
- d) A product recall plan
- e) A bio security plan
- f) A pest control plan
- g) A humane handling plan
- h) Potable water sampling done twice a year
- i) Every label for every product is approved prior to use
- j) Guarantees from each vendor/product that we use (bags, dish soap, sanitizers) kept on file and updated if we change or add products
- k) CCP checklists that are filled out, dated and signed every slaughter and or process day multiple times during the day
- l) Thermometer calibration logs
- m) cooler/freezer temperature monitor logs
- n) Pest control log
- o) * yes logs are different than plans

2) Facility

- a) Scrubbable floors with drains
- b) Scrubbable walls not painted, non porous
- c) A slaughter room (aka kill floor or dirty side)
- d) An evisceration room (aka clean side) the door between these two rooms cannot be opened during slaughter, no one from either room can cross from one to the other during slaughter
- e) A covered stainless steel chill tank with ice made from potable water
- f) An airlock room
- g) An inspectors office
- h) An inspectors bathroom

Our timeline on a routine slaughter and process day at Happy Bird Poultry Farm.

On the day of slaughter at the end of day all “whites” (aprons and coats) worn for slaughter are washed (on sanitize mode) in the washer, dried, folded and stored until the next slaughter day. As are the whites worn in the processing (cutting and packaging) room. Two separate loads of laundry, each kept separate at all times and used only for it’s own task.

4 PM the day prior feed is pulled from the birds that will be slaughtered the following day. This is step one of a cleaner finished product. By not having feed for the 12-24 hours prior to slaughter the birds crop and digestive tract is likely to be empty so no “ingesta” (partially digested food) is likely to get on the bird during the slaughter and evisceration process. Under inspection there is a zero tolerance for ingesta or feces on the bird prior to going in the chill tank.

4:00 AM Stacey goes to check the barn and do morning chores (this part is everyday)

4:30 AM Stacey begins sterilization of the slaughter and evisceration rooms and equipment (something that was already done at the end of day of the prior days slaughter) this includes all knives, scabbards, shackles, ceilings, walls, floors, stun knife, kill cones, scalding, plucker, evisceration track and trough. The chill tank, the bag shelf and the draining/bagging carousel (* carousel is unique to our facility designed by Stacey and built in food grade stainless steel by a local welding shop) floor mats and the heat shrink tank.

5:30AM begin filling the chill tank with the first round of ice and water. Attach the air hoses to the pneumatic tools. (we use pneumatic tools to remove the neck and heads, and to vacuum out the birds cavity quickly removing any traces of lung that may linger as well as the kidneys, which are fairly time consuming to remove by hand)

6 AM back to the barn to begin crowding the birds up to the slaughterhouse door. This is a slow process akin to pushing a chain somewhere. Outside the slaughter door (which in our case is in the barn still) we create a temporary holding pen each slaughter day.

6:30AM Stacey comes to the house to shower, change clothes have a coffee with me. After which we both return to the slaughterhouse.

7:00am Stacey adds more ice to the chill tank, as some has melted and the additional ice will mix with that to create sort a “slushy” mix that floats some of the ice cubes into the birds cavities to help chill them more quickly. (under inspection regulation we have 6 hours from time of slaughter (when the birds body temp is approx. 102F to bring the temp down to 44F for packaging or further processing aka parting the birds.) We strive to bring the temp down to 40F or less before packaging. (The 40 degrees is the temperature I learned from my dad.) I do the sanitization steps in the processing room in an adjacent building. These tasks include many of the same tasks Stacey completes in the slaughter house. Sanitizing the surfaces, knives, etc as well as the wheeled tote we use to transport the whole chilled birds to the processing room. As per inspection requirements they have to be moved in a covered food grade tote from the slaughter house to the processing room. When that is ready, I join Stacey, Frank and our inspector of the day. We are served by a random assortment of inspectors, not just one for long

periods of times. I will point out at this time that our inspector stays in the evisceration room for the duration of slaughter and inspects every bird that comes through the line. The inspector is also required to do two, 10 bird checks randomly during the slaughter day. We are required to do one, 10 bird check as well randomly during the slaughter day. * I will add the step by step of slaughter at the end so those who don't want to read it can skip the text that is in blue.

8:00am It is now 8 a.m Stacey and I can now mix our antimicrobial intervention. We dip each chicken in this after evisceration and rinse but before going in the chill tank. The antimicrobial dip is (in our case) a blend of lactic and citric acid (cleared for organic use) that we opt to use as an additional preventative step for controlling salmonella, thereby, making our chicken even less likely to cause a human to get salmonella aka food poisoning.

The inspector will do their check to confirm that the birds scheduled for today's slaughter are alive and well, as well as checking that the slaughterhouse is clean floor to ceiling and the utensils are as well.

8:10 am Slaughter begins. We will slaughter until noon or until the birds scheduled for the day are done whichever comes first. This is OUR schedule to meet inspection time limits. From noon until 1 the slaughtered and cleaned whole birds enjoy an ice bath. (time varies on actual end of slaughter time) During the chilling time Stacey, sanitizes the slaughterhouse, joins me and Frank for a quick lunch and then Frank cleans the pen(s) that we emptied, while Stacey and I bag, weigh and label the whole birds going out for orders from this flock and put the others that are to be utilized as cuts into the covered tote and we bring it over to the processing room. Stacey cuts the birds and I package, weigh, label and sort the cuts for orders. After cutting is complete he goes back to the barn to do afternoon chores and I finish packaging and clean up the processing room. The packaging and labeling MUST be complete prior to 4:30pm per inspection regulations. Our slaughter/process hours of operation are legally 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.

Thank you for reading! I've included a link for a "slideshow" of our facility. We take great pride and care to keep our slaughter and process facility clean and safe at all times. Chicken is a volatile meat source on it's BEST day, so for the safety of ourselves and our customers we take the rules of inspection very seriously!

Step by step of slaughter to store/table~

We are a crew of 3 (occasionally 4, if we are saving hearts and livers on that day OR have a larger than usual flock required to meet orders)

As mentioned earlier Stacey has crowded the birds up to the holding pen adjacent to the slaughter kill floor door) he picks up 2 birds at a time and puts them in the kill cones, he stuns them with the electric stun knife and bleeds them by cutting the carotid artery on each side of the neck (No chopping the heads off and letting them flop around where the old adage "Like a chicken with it's head cutoff" came from) the inspector needs to see the head attached to the chicken on the clean side of the facility. We have 8 kill cones, so Stacey will repeat this step 4 times, filling the cones. When the eighth bird is in the cone and bleeding, he will take the first two birds and dip them in and out of the scald several times for a few seconds each time.

Testing if the feathers are ready to be plucked, by pulling on a few. When they are ready to be plucked they will be put in the plucker and this step again is repeated until all 8 birds are in the

plucker. The plucker is then switched on and the birds are tumbled about on and against rubber fingers attached to the floor and walls of the plucker for a 30-90 seconds. The plucker is then switched off and Stacey hangs a bird in the shackles and pulls any wing or tailfeathers that the plucker may have missed. He then passes the plucked bird through the slide up window to the clean side of the slaughterhouse. They land on a food grade expanded stainless steel table. Here Frank, removes the oil gland, then hangs the bird in a shackle on the trolley track attached to the ceiling. He then opens "vent" of the bird and pulls the "vent" still attached to the intestines, out of the bird enough that the inspector (who stands on the line between Frank and I) can see the heart, liver and lungs and confirm that they are all healthy and viable, with no ingesta or fecal leakage from either breakage, puncture or disease. IF either are present the bird is condemned for compost. This is also the phase at which the inspector checks the head for signs of disease. After the inspector is satisfied that the bird is good, they push the bird down to me. Here I remove the head and neck and the viscera by hand and use the "lung gun" to vacuum the bits that may remain behind and the kidneys. I then rinse with cold water, inside and out, do any pin feathering and or trim that needs doing, then dip in the previously mentioned antimicrobial dip and put the bird into the chill tank. This process is repeated for each and every bird until we are out of birds. The antimicrobial dip is (in our case) a blend of lactic and citric acid (cleared for organic use) that we opt to use as an additional preventative step for controlling salmonella, thereby, making our chicken even less likely to cause a human to get salmonella aka food poisoning.

The birds then chill for approximately an hour, while we clean and have lunch as mentioned in the timeline. After that is done, we temp check three of the last and larger birds to go into the ice bath. We are in our second set of whites for the day. IF these birds are at proper temp, we begin the bagging and sorting process. Stacey takes a bird from the chill tank and places it on the carousel peg, where it drains briefly while he loads the rest of the carousel. He then puts a bag down over the bird and removes the bird in the bag from the peg. He then squeezes as much air out of the bag as he can and spins it creating a twist at the top of the bag, he then staples the bag with a stainless steel hog ring staple and drops it into the shrink tank. We use a specialty bag designed expressly to package chicken. The tank contains hot but not boiling water and the bag shrinks due to the heat and compresses the air out of the bag as it does so, creating a nice finished and sealed package. The individually bagged birds are then weighted and labeled. How many are individually bagged depends on the number ordered and the number we save for our store that slaughter day. The birds destined for cutting in the processing room are loaded into the cart, covered and wheeled over to the processing room. IF there are more birds than the cart will hold, these birds are bulk packed into large bags , (5-7 per bag) stapled and carried to the processing room.

Once in the processing room, Stacey begins cutting and each cut is placed in it's coordinating meat lug/tote. I begin packaging, vac-sealing, weighing and labeling each package of cuts. I also record each price filling each order as I do so. The finished packages orders are then either placed on trays to freeze for delivery the following day or placed in coolers for fresh delivery the following day. The majority of our product goes out as frozen on day of slaughter product by our choice. We feel that a chicken or a cut of chicken that is properly cooled and immediately frozen is the best quality product, providing our customer with a consistent FULL shelf life.

That is the end of the blue text, I have provided photos and video clips of all that I can easily do without doing it on an actual slaughter day. We cannot do a slaughterday tour for obvious reasons BUT if any or all of you want to come out to tour the slaughter house and processing room you are welcome to do so! We would appreciate you making an appointment, so we have the manpower here to do it. Weekends are fine, just let me know you are coming and introduce yourself when you arrive at the store. There are no barn tours due to our biosecurity plan and Avian Flu. You can however see into the barn from the slaughterhouse.

Thank you again for your time and reading this and considering my opinion as you make the decision about this bill and my and my families livelihood. We are 100% self-employed, this is not a hobby farm or a hobby.

Best,

Ember Boyle, owner

Happy Bird Poultry Farm, Smokehouse and Farm Market

568 Main Street

Isle La Motte, VT 05463

802-343-4182 text or voice (if you call leave a voice message because I don't answer calls from numbers not in my phone OR if I am with a customer, etc.)

HappyBirdPoultryFarm@gmail.com