

March 29, 2016

Good morning,

I am Peter Burmeister. I operate a VOF/USDA certified organic livestock and poultry farm in Berlin, VT as well as a Vermont state inspected, VOF/USDA certified organic poultry slaughter and processing facility. I proudly serve as a member of the Board of Directors of Rural Vermont, a statewide farmer advocacy organization with more than 1000 members, and am a member of its Policy Committee. Although I am affiliated with that organization, I speak today on my own behalf.

I am also an Adjunct Faculty member at Norwich University, where I teach business ethics. I mention this because the subject at hand, on-farm slaughter is an effort to address important ethical issues.

Before my family and I built the poultry slaughter facility, we considered having a state-inspected slaughterhouse for beef and hogs as well. However, the cost of building an operating such a structure for the relatively small number of animals that we raise, proved to be prohibitive.

The very worst days on my farm are those that require us to transport to a USDA inspected slaughterhouse the beef cattle and hogs that we have nurtured and raised from infancy. I say that not because I feel sad that the animals lives are coming to an end. I know that they were fed only the very best, nutritious certified organic feeds, some of which we raise right on our farm, and that they were housed in humane conditions.

The sadness I experience has to do with the need to “round up” the animals, lure them into a livestock trailer, and then transport them many miles to the slaughter facility. At the end of that process, when they reach their destination, the animals are stressed and exhausted. After months or years of careful animal husbandry, a miserable day or two wipes out much of the loving concern that made those creatures’ lives pleasant.

Formerly, we slaughtered our animals on the farm, then trucked the carcasses to a custom cutter for preparation and packaging so we could eat good organic meat, and also sell some to our neighbors and friends. It was a nearly painless process for the animals; it required very little time and effort, and we felt really good about our personal involvement with each creature from birth to slaughter. It was a time-honored practice with its roots in antiquity; it was a tradition.

As the Agency of Agriculture began to crack down on what was an illegal practice, we were forced to consider alternatives, because we were unwilling to blatantly break the law.

About eight years ago, the Legislature passed Act 207, which would have allowed on-farm slaughter, with some significant restrictions, ones that we were willing to adhere to. We were very excited to learn that the traditional practice of on-farm slaughter was about to be legitimized.

Unfortunately, personnel at the Agency of Agriculture raised significant objections to the new law and ultimately it was shelved, in spite of the will of our democratically elected Senators and Representatives.

It is my hope that at some point in the near future, our legislators will take another look at Act 207 and will pass a bill that replicates many of its provisions. If the Agency and the USDA raise objections again, I would hope that we could muster the courage to defend the legislation in the courts as well as to work with our Senators and Congressman to get the authorities in Washington to back off.

Currently we have in force Act 83, which permits on-farm slaughter under strict conditions that severely limit its practice. This Act is due to "sunset" in July of this year. It is my fervent hope that both Houses will, before the current session ends, pass a bill that will extend the Act for another three years. Bill H.860, currently under consideration, will do just that. Please see that it is passed.

In the future we need stronger legislation that will allow a limited number of animals to be slaughtered on farm and offered for sale at the farm, at farmers markets and to restaurants, much as limited quantities of poultry are permitted to be sold.

Thank you for your time and consideration.