


## MEMORANDUM

TO: House Commerce Committee  
FROM: Patricia Moulton, President   
Vermont Technical College  
DATE: 2.32.22  
SUBJECT: H.703 Section 2 (a) (4) Funding to Vermont Tech for meat cutter training.

Vermont Technical College has successfully been delivering meat processing training since 2018 at 151 Warehouse, formerly the Mad River Food Hub in Waitsfield. The demand for these trainings has increased over the past 2 years, outgrowing the capacity of the existing facility and instructors to fully meet the workforce training demand. The meat processing training facility will impact the meat processing supply chain by training a skilled processing workforce. An increased number of trained meat processors are needed in Vermont to maximize the use of existing slaughter facilities. The shortage of trained meat processors is limiting the ability of livestock producers to expand their operations to meet consumer demands. Increasing the number of trained meat processors is an important step in expanding the number of farmers, total acres farmed and production of food in Vermont.

Very recently, Vermont Tech received a cost estimate to convert space on our Randolph Center campus in to a USDA certified grade facility for the purposes of this training. The total cost is estimated at \$937,000 including construction costs and funding a Lab Director for 3 years to get this off the ground. We have included this personnel costs in a separate grant application to the US Economic Development Administration. Total construction costs are \$637,000. We are filing a grant application to the Working Lands Enterprise Board for their maximum of \$250,000. The funding in H.703 allocates \$300,000 leaving a gap of \$87,000 for construction and potentially \$387,000 if the EDA grant is not approved.

We respectfully request this committee increase the amount of funding in Section 2 (a) (b) to include the \$87,000 construction gap. If we are unsuccessful with EDA, we will consider other sources which may include a future request.

**Business Impact:**

This project supports VT and regional meat processing businesses. VT has 3,600 livestock and 256 poultry producers. VTC has communicated with PT farms, 151 Warehouse, Royal Butcher, Maple Winds, Hanover Coop, Southshire Meats, Higley Hill Processing, Vermont Farmers Food Center and Shaw's grocers. Their feedback has been integral in our planning process to expand the current meat processing program to meet market demands.

The closest training program for meat processing and managing skills is at SUNY Cobleskill. This program is in high demand, pulls participants regionally, and has an extensive wait list. VTC has engaged in numerous conversations with SUNY Cobleskill, and they support our plan to build and expand our meat processing program.

According to a VT Department of Labor report focused on occupations with immediate and long-term employment opportunities, meat processing is within the top 16<sup>of</sup> the 50 fastest growing occupations in Vermont, while food processing and food managers fall in the top 36 occupations with the most openings.

Based on feedback from businesses, DOL, VT Ag Agency, Farm to Plate, and current enrollment trends at VTC and SUNY Cobleskill, it is clear the meat processing training program, anchored by the facility, will meet immediate workforce training needs and long-term growth projections. A training program focused on direct processing skills, quality assurance, plant management, and food safety will support businesses, operators and staff with the skills needed to fill workforce gaps.

**Supply Chain Impact:**

Based on the VT Agency of Ag and Farm to Plate Strategic Plan for 2021-2030, the supply chain for the meat industry relies on slaughter, processing, and farm production of livestock for meat; all interdependent on each other. Meat processing services are creating a bottleneck between slaughter capacity and market demand for locally raised meats. Until this training is expanded, slaughter capacity

will not be maximized, and producers cannot maintain or expand their operations, or capitalize on value-added products. Businesses and job growth over multiple sectors will be hindered without industry expansion and meeting the current workforce needs. Additional workforce training is needed to develop the highly skilled employees who could support this industry growth. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses in the national meat supply chain that may open up additional regional market opportunities for the Vermont meat industry. The proposed project trains future entrepreneurs looking to enter into the growing regional market.

The proposed project supports the meat supply chain where it is needed most for growth, employee, and entrepreneurship skill development. The training program will target continuing education students, matriculated VTC students in the associates program for food entrepreneurship, CTE center students and employer partners such as Sodexo and VT First Initiatives.

According to the VT Agency of Ag and Farm to Plate Strategic report, the proposed project will support the following identified bottlenecks and gaps for this industry:

- Train employees in safe production and handling of meat.
- Deliver an educational program that target the specific meat processing skills needed in the industry and incorporate innovative collaborations with employer partners to off-set the training cost associated with training.

Vermont Tech very much appreciates this support!