



March 14, 2024

Senator Starr and members of the committee, thank you for considering my testimony.

For the record, my name is Allan Reetz. Much of my work for the Hanover Co-op Food Stores of Vermont and New Hampshire centers on support for small farmers and food producers.

I'm here today because H. 603 offers a practical change to deliver sound benefits to poultry producers, consumers, and restaurants. We can all agree that the repeal of on-farm processing restrictions will NOT benefit our food cooperative in White River Junction. But, that *does not* matter to me. This is about small farm business growth and potential that is stymied by Vermont's lack of small-batch processors. Making the policy for parting birds the same as for whole birds makes sense.

On-farm, uninspected parted-bird-processing has the following benefits:

1. For the producer:
 - a. A meat-bird poultry operation with increased product selection improves whole-farm viability,
 - b. On-farm processing means increased profit margins, and
 - c. It allows farms to be nimble and reduce time-to-market
2. For consumers, H. 603 helps Vermont's small poultry producers meet consumer preferences for poultry parts and ground products rather than full broilers.
 - a. Senator Starr, you and some on this committee may be quite skilled at parting out a bird, but customers at farmers markets these days would like the option of chicken breasts and thighs, much like they prefer to take home a beef tenderloin steak from the farmers market rather than having to take home and breakdown a full primal.
3. And restauranteurs and their teams also profit and benefit:
 - a. Speak to a chef/owner at one of Vermont's many restaurants serving local food and they will likely confirm that 40 to 50% of their profit comes from their specials menu.
 - i. The specials menu is the path to consumers' preference
 - ii. Yet, limited, or inconsistent supplies of fresh poultry inhibit the number of special entrees the restaurant can offer on a given night before selling out.
 - b. Ask a busy sous chef if they would rather part-out a chicken or just order it locally. Most will prefer to source local, parted chicken, and then dedicate time to preparing the rest of the evening menu and specials.

Finally, what about larger farms already equipped and inspected for chicken parting? They are already in prime position to successfully serve these consumers and certainly independent retailers and food co-ops around the state...which, of course, does matter to me.

Supporting smaller and new poultry producers in Vermont addresses small farm viability, diversification, and competitive resiliency. That is the intent of H. 603.

Thank you for considering my comments. I am happy to answer any questions.

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