



My Name is Margaret Loftus. My husband Jonathan and I own and operate Crossmolina Farm - a small, highly diversified farm in Corinth, Orange County.

We raise a wide variety of vegetables as well as pastured laying hens, Highland Cattle, lamb, pork and broiler chickens. We sell eggs and some pork products wholesale but the bulk of what we produce is sold directly to consumers at the Chelsea farmers market, through our CSA, and at our year-round farm store located in the center of town next to the post office and across from the town hall.

Our Farm has been a member of Rural Vermont and a Member of NOFA for many years and I am currently serving as a member of NOFA's Policy and Organizing Steering Committee.

I am here today to urge you to support H603 which would expand the current poultry slaughter exception to allow farms like ours to both process whole birds **and** to part birds and sell the parts individually under the same exception.

Our Farm has been processing our own pasture raised broilers since 2007. Currently, we raise about 600 broilers a season. We sell most of them in batches of five to ten birds to folks in town who are stocking their freezers. The sale of these pasture raised chickens is an important part of how our farm serves to connect our community to the land and to their food. Our customers know our family, they trust our farming practices, and they count on us to provide reasonably priced, locally raised food.

People love to roast a whole chicken. But have you ever noticed how all the interesting chicken recipes are for breasts, or legs? Consumers also want to buy chicken in smaller quantities and in particular cuts. We heard this for years and years from our customers purchasing bulk quantities of chickens but the need for parted birds increased significantly when we opened our farm store in 2020 and began selling more of our pastured meats on a retail basis. The customers who come to our farm store are looking for parted birds - not whole chickens.

In 2022 we looked into having some of our chickens processed by a third party under the auspices of the USDA as currently this is the only way we can sell parted chickens. Our choices were to take a four hour road trip with 150 chickens to Rhode Island or cross our fingers that the folks at Maplewind Farm would have the capacity to take our business.. We were lucky enough to get what I recall was the one opening Maplewind had that year for new producers. One important reason to support this bill is that there are simply not enough processing options available for USDA chickens. The shortage of slaughterhouses for beef, lamb and pork is certainly something our farm has had to contend with but there is an even greater lack of options when it comes to poultry. This bill would go a long way to alleviate that and to allow us as producers to do a better job meeting the demand for local meat.

Maplewind Farm does an amazing job processing our birds and we love working with them but the added cost per bird is almost \$10.00 between the processing fees (which are very reasonable), the cost of having the USDA on site to inspect, and the added travel and labor costs on our end. This is a cost we have to pass directly to our customers. If we were able to part the birds on our farm the added cost for parted chicken and the cost to the consumer would be lower. This is another critical reason to support this bill - it will help farms like ours keep local food accessible and, in turn, help to build a vibrant agricultural economy; both of which are goals that the state has identified in the recently released Food Security Roadmap.

In conclusion, I urge you to support H603. Expanding the current poultry exception to allow the parting of birds would help address the shortage of USDA poultry processing facilities in the state, allow small farms like ours who sell directly to their communities to meet the needs of their customers without increasing the cost and generally add to the vibrant agricultural economy that the state seeks to foster.

Sincerely,

Margaret Loftus, Co-Owner
Crossmolina Farm
West Corinth, Vermont
802-439-3358
www.crossmolinafarm.com
margaret@crossmolinafarm.com