

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5045

As of January 14, 2021

Title: An act relating to establishing a state meat and poultry inspection program.

Brief Description: Establishing a state meat and poultry inspection program.

Sponsors: Senators Warnick, Lovelett, Robinson, Rolfes, Schoesler, Short and Van De Wege.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/14/21.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a state meat and poultry inspection program only if the Department of Agriculture (WSDA) has full federal approval for the program.
- Sets inspection requirements under the meat and poultry inspection program.
- Allows WSDA to enter into a cooperative interstate shipping program agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: Washington State Department of Agriculture. The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Animal Health Program is charged with protecting animals and the public from communicable animal diseases. The WSDA Food Safety Program licenses custom meat businesses to slaughter or process uninspected meat food animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and swine for the sole consumption of the owner.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Public Sale of Meat. All meat for public sale is inspected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in compliance with the federal Meat Inspection Act. USDA delegated to WSDA authority to conduct meat inspections for certain facilities that only slaughter or prepare meat for consumption by the owner of the animal. USDA also delegated authority to WSDA to allow for the slaughter, preparation, and sale of 1000 or fewer birds per calendar year.

Custom Meat. Custom farm slaughterers, custom slaughtering establishments, and custom meat facilities must be licensed by WSDA. Before issuing any license to operate as a custom farm slaughterer, custom slaughtering establishment, and a custom meat facility, WSDA must inspect the facility and equipment. Custom farm slaughterers are mobile slaughter units to prepare meat food animals for the consumption of the owner of the animals, done on the owner's farm or at an approved site. A custom slaughtering establishment is a fixed facility to slaughter meat food animals for the owner. A custom meat facility is a facility operated by a person licensed to prepare uninspected meat for the sole consumption of the owner.

Summary of Bill: WSDA may establish a meat and poultry inspection program in the state only if WSDA has full federal approval for the program. WSDA may enter into a cooperative agreement with USDA in order to operate a state meat and poultry inspection program that is at least equal to federal requirements. WSDA may enter into a cooperative interstate shipping program agreement with USDA to allow establishments to ship products in interstate commerce.

The WSDA director may adopt rules to establish a meat and poultry inspection program and an interstate shipping program. The director may establish requirements and fees for licensing and license establishments under either program.

Under the meat and poultry inspection program, WSDA must:

- require antemortem and postmortem inspections, quarantine, and segregation by inspectors;
- require animals be identified for inspection purposes and that meat or poultry products be appropriately labeled, with labels that include all required information;
- prohibit meat or poultry products not prepared under inspection procedures from being brought into licensed establishments;
- require inspections meet certain sanitary standards and refuse to provide inspection service if sanitary conditions are not met; and
- require any person operating a licensed establishment to keep and allow examination of records, allow inspection of the business premises, and allow samples to be taken.

An animal showing symptoms of disease must be set apart and slaughtered separately from other livestock and poultry. Condemned animals must be destroyed under supervision of an inspector.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The pandemic impacted food distribution streams and this bill will provide more access for consumers to obtain protein and also provide a good outlet for producers. This bill will change the way that a small farmer can provide their product to the public and send the product to market. Farmers have to travel several hours to have their beef processed and mobile slaughter facilities will help farmers provide a better product. Consumers want to buy individual packages from their local farmers. This bill will give producers the opportunity to set prices for their product and sell their product on an individualized basis through direct marketing. Bringing a good, safe state inspection program will greatly increase Washington's food security. This bill will provide more outlets for producers to get their meat processed and will provide more sources and opportunities for consumers to access locally grown and inspected protein for their families. A state-based inspection program will create another option for farmers to process their meat, which ensures that their animals are being processed on time.

CON: For many small-scale operations, the USDA system is too cumbersome and time consuming. Creating a WSDA system will do little to resolve those issues. Custom exempt processors would have to upgrade their facilities to meet the federal requirements under a state program, not currently feasible for most processors. There are not enough processors to meet demand—they are aging out and their equipment is outdated, and this bill does not address this problem. There needs to be training programs and financial and educational help for processors who want to improve their facilities to meet USDA standards.

OTHER: This bill will establish a state program equivalent to USDA's inspection program, with a 50 percent federal match once the program is approved, which will take about two years. The bill recognizes that access to meat processing is a critical barrier to the success and growth of farms in the state. Small meat processors have been operating in aging buildings, without funding to invest in new meat cutting equipment, while also struggling to find and keep skilled staff. The way to help farmers is to increase access to and capacity of small processors by providing grants for upgraded equipment and infrastructure needs, as well as business and technical assistance, and subsidizing on-the-job training programs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Judy Warnick, Prime Sponsor; James McPhee, McPhee Family Farms; Molly Linville, citizen; Caleb Gwerder, Washington Farm Bureau; Beau Henneman, Stevens County Cattlemens Association; Mark Streuli, Washington Cattlemens Association.

CON: Kevin Svik, Peninsula Harvest Mobile Slaughter; Micha Ide, Bright Ide Acres.

OTHER: Alyssa Jumars, citizen; Laura Raymond, Department of Agriculture.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.