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March 15, 2023

Chair Samantha Vang
House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Vang and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share our strong support for the meat processing bills before your committee. The bottleneck in meat processing continues to be a challenge for our family farmer members as they work to expand their operations and meet local demand. Helping local and regional processors upgrade their facilities and train the next generation will help strengthen these small businesses and benefit our family farmer members.

MFU is grassroots general farm organization that has represented Minnesota's family farmers, ranchers, and rural communities since 1918. The meat processing bottleneck—laid bare by COVID-19—is a top concern for our family farmer members. That's why at our annual convention in November, delegates from across the state voted to make expanding local and regional processing one of our top Special Orders of Business for 2023. We support:

- **Funding the AGRI Value Added program for meat and poultry processing** (HF2563, Cha) – this flagship program to support meat and poultry processors has a strong track record of success and continued investment is well-timed. First, helping processors start up, expand, and modernize their facilities will help them serve more farmers, directly addressing the bottleneck experienced by our members across the state. Second—and much like farmers—many processors are reaching retirement age. Investing in upgrading their facilities will ensure that these businesses are able to transition to the next generation.
- **Funding grants for worker training, recruitment, and retention** (HF2562, Sencer-Mura) – this investment in scholarships and worker placement is well-timed with two colleges—Central Lakes in Staples and Ridgewater in Willmar—starting technical training programs to teach students the art of meat cutting. As the state went for a generation without any formal training for meat cutting, lack of a trained workforce continues to be a top challenge for meat processors as they work to meet demands from livestock producers and consumers. This program will leverage existing partnerships to help more students—including those for whom English is a second language—access the technical training programs and find employment in the industry.

Taken together, this work will help rebuild a system that was long neglected in Minnesota. We have a long way to go, but we are grateful for your committee's work to build a food system that is more distributed, resilient, and fair for workers, consumers, and farmers.

Thank you to your committee for your strong support of local meat processing and to Rep. Cha and Rep. Sencer-Mura for your leadership. If you have any questions, please contact our Government Relations Director, Stu Lourey, at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-2047 (C). Thank you for considering the needs and perspectives of Minnesota's farm families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Wertish". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "G" and "W".

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union