



March 1, 2023

House Agriculture Finance and Policy
Samantha Vang - Chair
545 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155
rep.samantha.vang@house.mn.gov

Paul Anderson – Ranking member
277 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155
rep.paul.anderson@mail.mn.gov

Senate Agriculture, Broadband and Rural Development
Aric Putnam - Chair
3215 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155
sen.aric.putnam@senate.mn

Torrey Westrom – Ranking member
2201 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155
sen.torrey.westrom@senate.mn

RE: HF 23 & SF 207: A bill for an act relating to labor; providing safe workplaces for meat and poultry processing workers; requiring a report; appropriating money.

Dear Chair Representative Vang and Senator Putnam as well as members of the Committee,

We are writing to share feedback and recommendations on HF 23 and SF 207, a bill under consideration in the state legislature that would require additional regulatory conditions on businesses as it relates to labor and workplace safety in the poultry and meatpacking industry.

As a small meat processor located in Cannon Falls, MN, we handle worker safety and extended employee leave from work with great care and attention. Maintaining an employee base sufficient to run our operation is extraordinarily difficult generally and only exacerbated with the Covid-19 pandemic. If we do not treat our workers with respect and provide appropriate accommodations and training on federal and state workplace safety, we risk our ability to service farmers and the brands that rely on us to market meat and meat products.

Lorentz Meats

705 Cannon Industrial Blvd.
Cannon Falls, MN 55009
(507) 263-3618
(507) 263-8219 (fax)
www.lorentzmeats.com

While we appreciate the intention of HR 23/ SF 207, our review leaves us to conclude the bill is excessively onerous for small meat processors with burdensome practice requirements, unreasonable and unclear sick leave expectations, and excessive and duplicative reporting mandates that are not proven to improve worker safety. The legislative text is overly prescriptive and provides no resources or guidance to industry participants.

A more measured approach would be to enable the Department of Labor to gather public input, survey industry stakeholders, and develop a legislative findings report that might outline a state program or pilot program as well as offer best practices and guidance resources for stakeholders. We would recommend the development of a multi-stakeholder advisory group to support the Department in carrying out this objective.

As it stands now, this legislation creates a one-size-fits-all approach whether you are an operation with 51 employees or 5,000. The complexities and differences in scale and approach in the meatpacking industry make it hard for any state legislature to be adequately equipped to outline the details of a state program that truly balances the needs of workers and meatpacking businesses. Following are examples of how differences of scale functionally matter especially when considering the two subjects of the bill: musculoskeletal disorders and pandemic measures.

Regarding musculoskeletal disorders, we feel some of the requirements are a reasonable extension of current MN OSHA requirements, focusing on ergonomic hazards. However, as such, they may be better suited to be proposed as enhancements of MN OSHA, applying to all industries, as it is not just meat processors who have these long-term issues. On the other hand, other requirements are not as reasonable. The ‘safe worker’ facility committee requirements in the bill are asking for more than reasonable cost and resources from smaller facilities like ours.

Further, smaller plants do not require employees to perform the same repetitive motions as larger plants. Employees may rotate duties throughout the day or week at a smaller plant; in a larger plant, an employee may stand in one place making the same motion for 8 hours every day. For us, specializing in small-run production, our 120 production employees fill three distinct business silos: slaughter and fabrication; sausage making; and specialty packaging. These two factors, small areas and small runs, mean that our employees are constantly changing some aspect of their work throughout the day—either changing job tasks or changing product—greatly reducing the type of ergonomic hazards targeted by this bill. The facility committee, as specified for these three business areas, will be three times as much of a burden for us than for some facilities much larger than ours, without proven benefits.

For the pandemic measures, throughout the two-year Covid-19 pandemic, we had no internal spread. Employees who contracted Covid outside of the workplace were honored with standard sick leave and we maintained strict protocols on worker reentry to protect our workforce. Our size was a big factor in being able to monitor and control internal spread. Other small plants similarly had few issues with covid.

The provisions laid out in the bill would place large additional administrative and cost burdens on a facility our size and smaller without bringing additional benefit. The extended paid sick time to care for grandparents, grandchildren, siblings or “any other individual related by blood or affinity...” sets up a scenario that requires a patrolling by employers and not a situation where employees and workers find joint accountability to support the people who rely on each other.

Lorentz Meats

705 Cannon Industrial Blvd.
Cannon Falls, MN 55009
(507) 263-3618
(507) 263-8219 (fax)
www.lorentzmeats.com

Our primary suggestion, as stated previously, is to enable the Department of Labor, with support from the Department of Agriculture, to carry forward a comprehensive research and input agenda followed by a report and findings prior to state program development.

If the legislature is unwilling to take this approach, we urge a modification to right size the audience subjected to the bill requirements. The Small Business Administration and USDA Food Safety and Inspection Services defines a “small” meat processor as a business with under 500 employees. While bill authors may want the regulations to cover a broader size of businesses, the current exemption of under 50 employees is arbitrary. We would suggest applying a simple 50% of the SBA/FSIS definition for small, meaning the bill would not apply to operations under 250 employees.

We appreciate the state legislature’s interest in the meatpacking industry and concern for our workers and hope a more collaborative approach can be found to achieve the common goal of a healthy, honored, skilled and productive meat processor worker and industry.

Sincerely,



Mike Lorentz
CEO/Owner
mlorentz@lorentzmeats.com

CC Sam Akers, Corporate Manager (sakers@lorentzmeats.com)

Lorentz Meats

705 Cannon Industrial Blvd.
Cannon Falls, MN 55009
(507) 263-3618
(507) 263-8219 (fax)
www.lorentzmeats.com