



Cottonwood | Jackson | Lincoln | Lyon | Murray | Nobles | Pipestone | Redwood | Rock

3/23/2026

Dear Legislators,

On behalf of the Southwest Regional Development Commission, I am writing to strongly urge the continuation of funding for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Meat Train and Retain Grant Program. The current grant contract is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2026, and extending it is essential to sustaining the momentum and impact this program has already generated.

In early 2024, the Southwest Regional Development Commission {SRDC} partnered with the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission {MMDC} and the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC) to prepare a \$250,000 grant application for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's {MDA} Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program. The partnership was awarded the grant in May 2024, launching the Southwest Minnesota Meat Processor Workforce Development Initiative. This funding has supported small- and medium-sized meat and poultry processors by helping them hire, train, and retain new employees, strengthening the region's processing workforce and long-term industry capacity.

The critical role of the meat and poultry processing industry in Southwestern Minnesota's economy cannot be overstated. Our meat and poultry processors provide essential services to farmers, consumers, and businesses alike. They also provide a wealth of opportunity for family-sustaining employment. This initiative to invest in on-the-job and formal training is helping our processing businesses onboard and retain skilled workers.

The SRDC, serving as the fiscal host, has advanced critical workforce development efforts by partnering with the Southwest Private Industry Council and Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Service. Both organizations are recognized leaders within CareerForce and have long-standing success supporting job seekers, students, and employers. Through this initiative, they have delivered a range of contracted services, including Career Navigator support, which tracks participant engagement and outcomes through an established software system. Ridgewater College has also played a pivotal role, leveraging its expertise in the meat and poultry processing industry to identify key challenges and contribute targeted solutions throughout the initiative.

The Southwest Regional Development Commission strongly supports extending the current MDA Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program contract beyond its scheduled sunset date of June 30, 2026. Continuing this investment will strengthen workforce capacity, bolster local processing infrastructure, and help secure a more resilient and prosperous agricultural sector in Southwest Minnesota for generations to come.

Sincerely,

  
Robin Weis | Deputy Director *km*

P: 507-836-8547 ex 1638 | C: 507-220-4891 | [robin@swrdc.org](mailto:robin@swrdc.org)



2401 Broadway Ave, Suite 1  
Slayton, MN 56172



P: 507-836-8547  
F: 507-836-8866



[swrdc.org](http://swrdc.org)  
[srdc@swrdc.org](mailto:srdc@swrdc.org)



# DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## FREE TUITION for Meat Cutting & Butcher Training

Southwest Regional Development Commission is using grant funds to provide training for small- to medium-size meat and poultry processors.

**This program removes employment barriers, supports career growth, and invests in 30 individuals in Southwest Minnesota.**



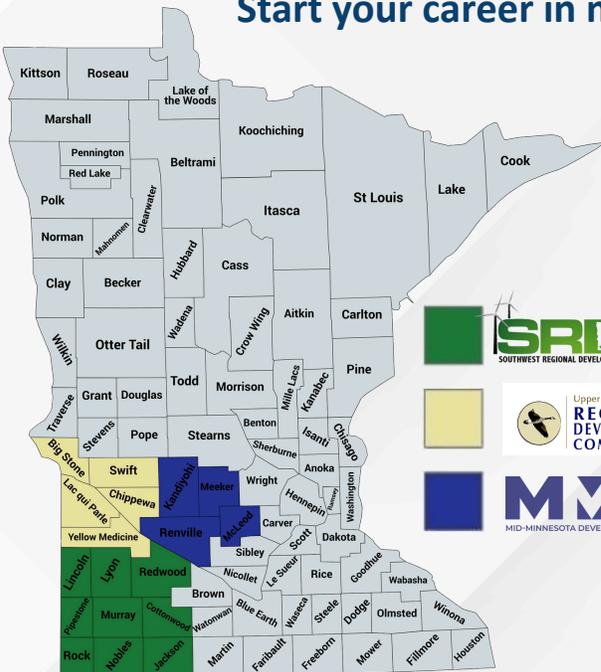
### WHY APPLY?

- FREE TUITION
- On-The-Job Training & Supplies
- Career Navigation Support
- Retention Incentives

### FLEXIBLE TRAINING OPTIONS

- Online Coursework - flexible, learn at your own pace
- Weekly On-the-Job Training near you
- No relocation required
- Fall & Spring semester starts available

**Start your career in meat cutting or become a butcher with full support!**



**For more information contact:**

**Sophia Berg**

Phone: 320-222-8276

Email: [Sophia.Thommes@ridgewater.edu](mailto:Sophia.Thommes@ridgewater.edu)

**Bridget Paulson**

Central MN Jobs & Training Services, Inc

Phone: 320-290-7685

Email: [bpaulson@cmjts.org](mailto:bpaulson@cmjts.org)

**Tim Jones**

Southwest MN Private Industry Council

Phone: 507-828-1382

[tjones@swmnpic.org](mailto:tjones@swmnpic.org)





# Latino Economic Development Center

*Centro para el Desarrollo Económico Latino*

(651) 395-4035

East Side Enterprise Center  
804 Margaret St. Saint Paul, MN 55106

info@ledcmn.org  
www.ledcmn.org

March 24, 2026

Co-Chair Hansen  
Co-Chair Paul Anderson  
House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee  
75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard, Room G 3  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Co-Chair Hansen, Co-chair Anderson, and committee members:

On behalf of the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC), I am writing to express my support for **HF 4372** to extend MDA's Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program contracts for an additional year beyond their scheduled sunset date of June 30, 2026.

In the Spring of 2025, LEDC was awarded a Train and Retain grant to help small and medium-sized meat processors across greater Minnesota help find and incentivize keeping much needed employees. This was a new program for Minnesota, and it took us many months to move the project from conception to practice. We now have MOUs with three processors which accounts for 9 employees of small meat processors. The current grant contract is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2026, and extending it an additional year is essential to sustaining our outreach to meat processors and the potential workforce. We feel confident that having another year is the best way for us to help the state keep investing in small to medium-sized meat processors in Minnesota.

This funding is helping our processing businesses onboard and retain skilled workers. LEDC strongly supports extending the current MDA Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program contract beyond its scheduled sunset date of June 30, 2026, for an additional 1 year. Continuing this investment will strengthen workforce capacity, bolster local processing infrastructure, and help secure a more resilient agricultural sector in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

**Alma Flores**  
Executive Director  
Latino Economic Development Center  
804 Margaret Street, Saint Paul, MN 55106  
Main (612) 724 5332

**Aaron Blyth**  
Director of Agriculture  
Latino Economic Development Center  
804 Margaret Street, Saint Paul, MN 55106  
Main (612) 724 5332



March 24, 2026

Co-Chair Hansen  
Co-Chair Paul Anderson

House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee  
75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard, Room G 3  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Co-Chair Hansen, Co-chair Anderson, and committee members:

On Behalf of the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC), I am writing to state our support for HF4372 to allow grantees some more time to complete our projects in support of small meat processors.

R5DC was awarded an investment through the MDA Train and Retain Grant Program in the spring of 2025 and is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2026. Extending the term of award an additional year as proposed by Rep Vang would be most welcome. The additional time will allow us to fully execute stated deliverables as well as tell several stories about how this program made a difference in rural economies and livelihoods.

With this funding we have partnered with the MN Farmers Union, Central Lakes College and Ridgewater College meat cutting workforce training program. R5DC strongly supports extending the current MDA Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program contracts beyond its scheduled sunset date of June 30, 2026, for an additional 1 year. Continuing this investment will strengthen workforce capacity, bolster local processing in Minnesota.

Thank you for consideration of this request and for supporting this important program.

In service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Cheryal Lee Hills'.

Cheryal Lee Hills, R5DC Executive Director

**Bridging Relationships & Resources**

200 1st Street NE Suite 2, Staples, MN 56479 | 218.894.3233 | [regionfive.org](http://regionfive.org)