

AGRICULTURE COALITION URGES ACTION ON INTERSTATE MEAT SHIPMENT BILL

Farm Groups Launch National Grassroots Campaign to Support Passage

NEWS RELEASE

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Washington, D.C. – A broad-based coalition of agricultural and farm organizations is urging Congress to take prompt action on legislation introduced June 15 that would allow interstate sales of state-inspected meat and poultry products. S. 3519, the Agricultural Small Business Opportunity and Enhancement Act of 2006, was introduced by Sens. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Kent Conrad (D-ND), and Herb Kohl (D-WI).

Agriculture coalition members said the legislation will resolve a basic inequity which has existed since 1967. Removing the current ban on interstate sales will level the economic playing field for small business, spur more competition in the marketplace, create a more uniform inspection system and further enhance food safety and consumer confidence in the food supply. The coalition is also launching a national grassroots campaign to support passage of the bill. Coalition members include: the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA); American Association of Meat Processors (AAMP); Center for Rural Affairs; American Meat Goat Association; Kansas Livestock Association; National Farmers Union; National Grange; American Sheep Industry Association (ASI); Missouri Association of Meat Processors; Montana Chamber of Commerce; National Association of State Meat and Food Inspection Directors (NASMFID); National Bison Association; North Dakota Meat Processors Association (NDMPA); North Dakota Stockmen's Association; Ohio Association of Meat Processors; R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America; Texas Association of Business; and Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors.

State and local agricultural groups have long sought to fix current law which is outdated and restricts free markets. The 1967 and 1968 Meat and Poultry Acts prohibit state-inspected products (beef, poultry, pork, lamb, and goat) from being sold in interstate commerce. However, the prohibition does not apply to "non-amenable" products—such as venison, pheasant, quail, rabbit, and a host of others. These products are normally regulated by state inspection programs, yet can be shipped in interstate commerce without restriction. The agricultural coalition pointed out that it does not make sense to allow these products to be shipped across state borders while beef, poultry, pork, lamb and goats cannot be shipped interstate.

S. 3519 would expand marketing opportunities for farmers and ranchers which they never had before. Without change, growing concentration in the processing sector will continue to leave smaller farmers and ranchers with fewer buyers for their livestock and poultry. Increased markets will stimulate small business sales, expand rural development, and increase local tax bases—all of which will benefit farmers, ranchers, processors, related industries, and consumers. Three USDA advisory committees have recommended that the ban on interstate sales be removed.

The agricultural coalition further noted that the legislation would also ensure fairness in trade. Foreign-produced meat and poultry products can be freely shipped and sold anywhere in the U.S. as long as that foreign country's inspection program is equivalent to U.S. federal standards—the same standard which state meat inspection programs must meet. State agriculture officials pointed out that S. 3519 would provide small businesses in the U.S. with the same marketing opportunities given to companies in foreign countries.

Coalition members emphasized that state and federal inspection programs should function together as a seamless system in both intrastate and interstate commerce. "We hope Congress will act this year because this legislation will further enhance food safety, improve competition, and benefit farmers, ranchers, and consumers."