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March 2, 2022

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

Dear Chair Sundin and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share our support for Rep. Nelson's bill to provide training grants to meat and poultry processors (H.F. 3640). The bottleneck in 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 invest in training is one way your committee can help strengthen these small businesses and support family farmers.

This investment in training is well-timed, because two colleges—Central Lakes and Ridgewater—are preparing to start meat processing training programs this coming fall. Both programs are being designed in close partnership with industry and will have flexible options for customized training. Providing support for processors or their employees to attend trainings at these colleges or other institutions could help those businesses up their inspection status, add new species, or execute a generational transition. All of these actions will serve local farmers well.

Finally, it is important to note that this is not the only investment needed to support small processors. We also strongly support direct support for Central Lakes and Ridgewater, investing the AGRI Value Added program to expand processing capacity, helping processors with worker recruitment and retention, and expanding opportunities to learn about meat processing in high school ag programs.

Thank you to your committee for your strong support of local processing. We believe these investments are central to building a food system that is more distributed, fair, and secure. 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, flowing style.

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union