



July 6, 2021

Joint Committee on Public Health
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Rooms 413-C/130
Boston MA 02133

RE:

- S1441: An Act relative to in-state meat inspection programs
- H4085: An Act to support infrastructure needs for livestock farmers

Dear Chairs Comerford and Decker, and members of the committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony on S1441 and HD4085.

A crisis in local livestock farming has been building for many years and was exacerbated further by the COVID pandemic. In short, there is not enough livestock slaughter and processing capacity in the Commonwealth. The need for such infrastructure has arisen as demand for local meat has increased steadily and farmers are boosting production to meet that demand. But with just a few facilities in the state, farmers are forced to bring their animals to out-of-state processors. This limits economic development here in Massachusetts, puts farmers under financial and operating stress, degrades the Commonwealth's food security, and increases the risk of food supply disruption due to external threats, such as the recent ransomware attack on large-scale meat processors.

These bills seek to improve local food security by following the steps taken by 27 other states that have collaborated with USDA to create state-inspected slaughter and processing programs. While USDA requires that state regulations and protocols be at least as stringent as those at the federal level, state programs allow facilities to operate at scales more appropriate for local need, adjusting to seasonal demand and using inspectors to serve multiple plants, allowing for more flexible and affordable options.

We support legislation that requires a collaborative effort between MDAR, DPH, UMass Extension, and farmers to develop, implement, and operate a state slaughter and processing inspection program. Each of these institutions brings critical expertise to the process that will help ensure systemic change that will benefit farmers and customers, and ensure a safe and reliable food supply.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, a 17-member entity comprising state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the Legislature and Governor to develop recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability, equity, and resilience in the Commonwealth's food system.

The need for increased infrastructure for meat processing was proposed by the Local Food Action Plan, and that recommendation was reinforced in the Collaborative's report *Massachusetts' Local Food System: Perspectives on Resilience and Recovery*, published during the COVID crisis and based on input from hundreds of organizations and farmers throughout the Commonwealth.

The Collaborative is available to provide additional information and connections to practitioners and advocates who can offer specific insights on this legislation, at the pleasure of the Committee.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,



Winton Pitcoff
Director