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**NASDA calls on USDA to protect diversity of meat processing through flexible funding opportunities**

Today, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture expressed its [recommendations](#) for a resilient, diverse and secure meat processing system. Specifically, NASDA commented that flexible funding for solutions to workforce shortages and processing infrastructure investments for small to mid-sized meat processing facilities is critical to ensuring our food system is built to handle future challenges.

Twenty-seven state departments of agriculture operate state meat and poultry inspection programs covering approximately 1,900 small or very small establishments. State agriculture departments hold a unique position as they are the only entities certified to inspect meat other than the USDA. Nationwide, NASDA members report small establishments are facing significant challenges with shortages of inspectors and workers.

“[Having re-assembled our food supply chains](#) in response to each hurdle the COVID-19 pandemic has presented, NASDA members deeply understand the connection between diversity in production and food system resiliency,” NASDA CEO Dr. Barb Glenn said. “We must do all we can to support our small meat processors now and invest in their ability to stand on their own into the future.”

To reduce the impact of labor shortages and recruit more workers, NASDA recommends using USDA funding to offset employment costs, invest in workforce training programs and offer apprenticeship programs for small processing plants.

“First and foremost, we must ensure our small meat processors are protected from the instability that understaffing and turnover produces,” NASDA CEO Dr. Barb Glenn said. “Without the foundation of a secure and skilled workforce, small processors are destined to fold under any other market challenges.”

NASDA members also report high investment costs, and outdated facilities as a primary concern for small to mid-sized meat processors. In its comments, NASDA recommended providing funding for new equipment to increase the competitiveness and efficiency of small operations in addition to trainings on proactive food safety protocols and operating modernized facilities.

In addition, as USDA seeks to establish partners and new funding opportunities to support meat processors, NASDA urges USDA to recognize state departments of agriculture as exceptional resources.

“When funding is dedicated to state and local governments, state agriculture departments are better able to stabilize local supply chain disruptions and continue delivering critical services to farmers, ranchers and communities,” Glenn said.

In its comments NASDA also asked USDA intentionally to create opportunities with flexible funding structures to especially enable areas outside the mainland states to participate in federally implemented programs. For example, states such as Alaska, Hawaii and the four U.S. territories have experienced vastly different supply chain disruptions. NASDA members’ ability to use CARES Act funding for their state-specific needs saved rural communities from economic detriment.

“Each state has unique attributes that contribute to the overall complexity of the food system,” Glenn said. “We stand ready to help USDA support the long-term resiliency and diversity of our food system by creating opportunities that allow small meat processors to address their local needs and individual challenges.”



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NASDA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit association which represents the elected and appointed commissioners, secretaries and directors of the departments of agriculture in all fifty states and four U.S. territories. NASDA grows and enhances American agriculture through policy, partnerships and public engagement. To learn more about NASDA, please visit [www.nasda.org](http://www.nasda.org).



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