

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Joann Flower at 9:00 a.m. on March 18, 1998, in Room 423-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Representative Correll - excused
Representative Neufeld - absent
Representative Peterson - excused

Committee staff present: Raney Gilliland, Legislative Research Department
Gordon Self, Revisor of Statutes
Kay Scarlett, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:
Laurel Murdie, Legislative Division of Post Audit

Others attending: See attached list

Chairperson Flower asked committee members to review the minutes of March 17. If there were corrections or additions, members were asked to contact the committee secretary before 5:00 p.m. or they will stand approved as presented.

Laurel Murdie, Legislative Division of Post Audit, provided the committee with an overview of the performance audit report, "Assessing Whether State Regulation of Meat Processing Plants is More Stringent and Costly than Federal Regulations Require," March 1998. The post audit report addressed two questions:

1. What do meat processing plants have to do under new federal laws and regulations relating to food safety requirements, and how is this information being communicated to them?
2. Has Kansas adopted more stringent requirements for meat processing plants than those imposed by the federal government, and if so, what is the additional cost of those requirements?

Ms. Murdie stated that recent changes in requirements that Kansas-inspected meat plants must follow has been the source of significant anxiety and uncertainty. As federal regulations were adopted at the state level, conflicting cost estimates and uncertain implementation dates left many unclear about how and when those new requirements might affect the plants. She said that complying with these new requirements probably will result in some increase in costs, and may have other impacts, but the nature and number of such changes are not likely to be as significant as the legislature initially was led to believe.

She said that it is difficult to predict the impact of the one remaining unimplemented aspect of the new requirements -- developing Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point systems. She believes that training for plant owners in those new requirements will reduce uncertainty and help ensure effective implementation. She said that while it may not be realistic to expect that a group of inspectors spread over the state would have identical interpretations and viewpoints, further training of those inspectors in both new and existing requirements would help reduce any inconsistencies that may exist.

Ms. Murdie reported that the Legislative Division of Post Audit made several recommendations in regard to the first question:

1. The Kansas Department of Agriculture should ensure that notices of changes in regulatory requirements are provided to its inspectors before they are provided to plant owners.
2. The Kansas Department of Agriculture should encourage plant owners to obtain training in HACCP requirements as soon as possible.

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, Room 423-S Statehouse, at 9:00 a.m. on March 18, 1998.

3. To ensure that state meat and poultry inspectors are enforcing state regulations as consistently and fairly as possible, the Kansas Department of Agriculture should: a) identify the specific differences meat and poultry processing plant owners think exist between inspectors, or from one region of the state to another, and b) provide standardized training for all its inspectors now, and on a periodic basis.

In response to the second question, Ms. Murdie said that because the requirements for Kansas' meat-inspection program are at least equal to the federal requirements relating to sanitation and inspections, there are no additional costs for more stringent requirements. She noted that Department officials and Kansas' state-inspected plant owners are frustrated with the federal prohibition against selling meat across state lines, but any changes in this area will have to be made at the federal level.

Responses from Allie Devine, Secretary, Kansas Department of Agriculture, and Patty Clark, Director, Agriculture Products Development Division, Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing, are included with the post audit report. Copies of the performance audit report can be obtained from the Legislative Division of Post Audit.

The meeting adjourned at 9:53 a.m. No further meetings of the House Committee on Agriculture are scheduled for the 1998 legislative session.

HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE GUEST LIST

DATE: March 18, 1998

NAME	REPRESENTING
John McEntyre	Post Audit
Laurel Murdie	LPA
Marty Vance	KS Ag Alliance