

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dan Johnson at 3:30 p.m. on February 6, 2006, in Room 423-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

- Representative John Faber- excused
- Representative Joann Freeborn- excused
- Representative Doug Gatewood- excused
- Representative Steve Lukert - excused
- Representative Virgil Peck- excused
- Representative Larry Powell- excused
- Representative Joshua Svaty- excused

Committee staff present:

- Raney Gilliland, Kansas Legislative Research Department
- Gordon Self, Revisor of Statutes Office
- Kay Scarlett, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:

- Constantine Cotsoradis, Assistant Secretary, Kansas Department of Agriculture
- Martin Luther, Luther's Smokehouse, Inc.

Others attending:

See attached list.

Minutes of the January 30 and February 1 meetings were distributed. Members were asked to notify the committee secretary of any corrections or additions prior to 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, February 8, or the minutes will be considered approved as presented.

Constantine Cotsoradis, Assistant Secretary, Kansas Department of Agriculture, provided an overview of the Kansas Meat and Poultry Inspection Program, one of the agency's food safety programs. They inspect and regulate primarily small meat processing facilities—both fully inspected plants that process meat sold at meat counters, restaurants or grocery stores and custom plants that process animals for the owner's own consumption. He noted that all processing facilities in the United States must be under either federal or state inspection. Currently there are 79 fully inspected plants and 28 custom-exempt plants under state inspection in Kansas. He explained that because of economic changes, federal requirement changes, and because consistent inspection is paramount, this program must always be ready to adapt, stressing that food safety is the agency's goal.

In response to concerns expressed in a letter to legislators in January by a member of the Kansas Meat Processors Association, who does not operate a state-inspected plant, Mr. Cotsoradis reported that the department has met with elected officials and members of the meat processing industry. It was determined that better communication was needed between the agency and industry, exemplified by seven of the industry's areas for desired changes in food safety regulation. He reported that the agency recently formalized their risk-based approach to inspecting custom-exempt plants to ensure uniform and consistent inspection frequency throughout the state. They are attempting to achieve consensus on policies for non-ambulatory animals, the condition of carcasses, vacuum packing meat products, understandability of rules and regulations, and the use of local veterinarians. The agency is amending their regulations to raise the dollar amount a retail store can sell to hotels, restaurants, and institutions to the federal level. He is hopeful that better communication will improve relations with the industry, further improve the agency's service to the industry, while continuing to ensure food safety for the public. (Attachment 1)

Mr. Cotsoradis and Dr. Evan Sumner, Kansas Meat and Poultry Inspection Program Manager, answered committee questions. The Chairman reported that the owner of Smoky Hill Meat Processing in Victoria, who had previously expressed concerns with the state meat inspection program, had called him to say that he believed better communication and recent efforts by the agency to address industry concerns were showing improvement in service. He supports a state meat inspection program.

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE House Agriculture Committee at 3:30 p.m. on February 6, 2006, in Room 423-S of the Capitol.

Martin Luther, a member of the Kansas Meat Processors Association and owner of Luther's Smokehouse, Inc., in LeRoy, a federally inspected facility, reported that since June he and his wife had traveled the state visiting 90 percent of the small meat processing plants in Kansas. He asked that the legislature address problems with the state meat inspection program and support equalization and not more restriction than required by USDA. He outlined areas where he believes improvements in the state meat inspection program are needed including supporting materials and letters from three processing plant owners. (Attachment 2)

In response to committee requests for information, the Kansas Department of Agriculture provided a list of facilities that have left state inspection since HACCP was implemented in January 2000, those that have gone federal, and new facilities under state inspection. The agency also provided copies of the 1997 outside peer review of the Kansas Meat and Poultry Inspection Program. (Attachment 3)

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m. The next meeting of the House Agriculture Committee is scheduled for February 8, 2006.