

Wisconsin Farmers Union: Releases meat processing report

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 22, 2021

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Member-led effort includes resources, stakeholder viewpoints

on Wisconsin meat processing shortage, potential solutions

CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI — As you gather around the table for holiday dinner, will you know where the meat on your table came from? A new report investigates the effects consolidation in the meat processing industry has had on family farms, small and mid-scale processors, and consumers.

Earlier this year, Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) convened a Meat Processing Task Force that developed a series of webinars and panel discussions to explore the complexity of the issue and potential solutions. Task force members also helped develop a network analysis and collect resources to further address issues within meat processing.

Findings from those efforts have been compiled in WFU's newly launched report "[MeatProcessing in Wisconsin: Challenges and Opportunities.](#)" The publication includes viewpoints and resources collected from key stakeholders, including state agencies, national partners, impacted farmers, small-scale processors, and labor organizations.

"It has been so wonderful to work with farmers, small- and mid-scale processors, and labor groups and find so much common interest in resolving the issues present in this part of our food system," says WFU Director of Special Projects Lauren Langworthy. "Understanding the issues that impact everyone along the chain from farmers to eaters helps us build coalitions focused on resolving the most pressing concerns."

As the report notes, “In recent years, a trend toward fewer and larger (often multinational and many vertically-integrated) corporations in the meat processing sector has worsened. The dominant corporations in the industry have been under scrutiny for price fixing, labor rights infringements, misleading labeling, and other unsavory practices. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the fragility of this highly-consolidated system and the plight of the farmers and laborers who work within it all became much more abundantly clear.”

Only 50 meat plants slaughter and process 98 percent of the U.S. meat supply. Meanwhile, the [Farmer's Share](#) of the retail food dollar is only 14 cents.

“Investing in meat processing is an investment in rural America and the security of our food supply,” said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. “Expanding processing capacity opens the door for farmers to regain some control by marketing animals directly to consumers. However, we also need to increase competition and fairness in the marketplace and address misleading labels. This report offers a slew of solutions and policy priorities to improve the situation for farmers and consumers.”

Wisconsin Farmers Union members identified Meat Processing Infrastructure as a Special Order of Business in both 2020 and 2021. The family farm organization was a vocal advocate for support for meat processing infrastructure in the state budget and strongly supported new initiatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection that aim to help meat processing facilities expand, modernize, and increase capacity.

The report also calls for action at the state and federal level to address market manipulation, invest in infrastructure, and strengthen antitrust enforcement in the meat processing industry.

Learn more about WFU's ongoing work around this issue and view the report at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/processing

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement.