

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Protection: UWRF and DATCP launch humane handling institute

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RIVER FALLS, Wis. – A first of its kind program, the Humane Handling Institute (HHI), will provide comprehensive hands-on training for current meat industry workers in humane pre-slaughter handling, transport, stunning, and equipment maintenance. The formation of the HHI was announced by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF) and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) on October 20. HHI is expected to help improve the long-term viability of Wisconsin's \$34 billion livestock and meat industries.

The project is funded by the [Meat Talent Development Program](#), a \$5 million program created by Governor Tony Evers to strengthen the state's meat processing supply chain and workforce. DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski joined UWRF administrators and faculty and meat industry representatives on campus to make the announcement.

“Governor Evers’ strategic investments continue to create opportunities for growth and resiliency in Wisconsin’s meat and livestock industry,” said DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski. “The HHI will provide one-of-a-kind training to the industry and lead the way for humane handling education across the state and nation. This partnership will support workforce training, create product marketing opportunities, and provide education on regulatory issues for meat processing establishments.”

“I want to thank Governor Evers for establishing this program to aid the meat industry,” said UWRF Chancellor Maria Gallo. “The involvement of our quality faculty in developing the content for this effort will ensure it contains the latest best practices and will be delivered effectively.”

“The objective of the HHI is to develop humane handlers, stunner operators, and maintenance personnel that have a deeper understanding of the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of humane handling, stunning, and slaughter,” said Kurt Vogel, UWRF associate professor of animal science and director of the HHI. “Since 2014, the UW-River Falls Animal Welfare Lab has tracked humane handling enforcement actions by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and consistently identified pre-slaughter stunning as a critical area of need for additional training and development. Effective stunning is important for animal and worker welfare and there are additional downstream benefits to efficiency of production and meat product quality that add support to a well-justified cause.”

The program consists of a series of 2.5-day-long workshops. Interested participants can select the workshops that meet their needs or complete the entire series of workshops and an additional project for comprehensive certification. Trainees that complete the series and project will receive a certificate in humane handling and stunning and the limited rights to utilize the program logo in marketing and promotional materials.

Tuition reimbursement will be offered to 120 trainees from small slaughter establishments across the state for the two workshops that address critical regulatory challenges for these plants, but any current or aspiring staff may enroll in any of the five workshops.

Steve Van Lannen, incoming chair of the North American Meat Institute and COO of American Foods Group, was on hand for the event.

“I want to thank Governor Evers, DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for supporting animal and worker welfare within the meat industry,” Van Lannen said. “This program will be invaluable as we continue to operate in Wisconsin. As an industry and through our work with the [Protein PACT](#), we understand that wholesome meat, poultry, and dairy start with providing the most humane care and raising healthy animals. The Humane Handling Institute will help support us in our initiatives.”

“The HHI is going to provide an avenue for meat industry workers to gain invaluable hands-on training. UW-River Falls is meeting an industry need that spans across large and small meat plants,” said Dr. Miriam Martin, director of Animal Health and Welfare at the North American Meat Institute, who could not be present for the announcement. “The North American Meat Institute commends the staff at UW-

River Falls for meeting an important need in the meat industry that will have a positive and immediate impact on improving animal welfare.”

About UW-River Falls

UWRF is a student-centered institution that provides excellent, accessible academic programs serving the needs of our region, the state and beyond. Visit [Humane Handling Institute](#) for updated information on the program.

About DATCP and the Meat Talent Development Program

DATCP partners with all the citizens of Wisconsin to grow the economy by promoting quality food, healthy plants and animals, sound use of land and water resources, and a fair marketplace. For more information on DATCP, visit datcp.wi.gov, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

Governor Evers' [Meat Talent Development Program](#) includes efforts to attract students to meat careers, provide financial support to students in Wisconsin meat processing training programs, support meat processing program development, and connect the industry with potential employees. In addition to the Humane Handling Institute, the program continues to release new projects that support Wisconsin's meat industry workforce including a high school meat industry curriculum, providing tuition reimbursement for HACCP trainings, and the development of a [Meat Pathways website](#). For more information on this initiative, visit [DATCP's website](#) and sign-up for [email updates](#).