

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Say farewell to summer by grilling locally produced meat

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MADISON, Wis. – With August coming to a close, many Wisconsinites look toward Labor Day as the last major weekend of summer. It is a time to get together with family and friends, fire up the grill, and enjoy one last cookout or campfire before fall sets in. While it's not easy to bid farewell to the summer grilling season and all that comes with it, fall also gives us a lot to look forward to, including Green Bay Packers football and a host of social gatherings centered around the sport.

It is always exciting to root for Wisconsin's favorite professional football team as they devour their opponents week after week. Just as commendable are Wisconsin's other packers – the more than 500 meat processing facilities that are located across the state. These businesses work tirelessly year-round to keep Wisconsin's meat industry thriving and provide protein-rich snacks and meals to consumers.

In the same way the Packers utilize the talents of their roster, the State of Wisconsin, too, continually invests in its strengths, which is evidenced by the \$10 million in funding Gov. Evers allocated to create the Meat and Poultry Supply Chain Resiliency Grant Program in 2022. This program, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), allowed Wisconsin meat processors to apply for grants of up to \$150,000, with a goal of increasing processing capacity and building critical infrastructure in the meat industry.

In his 2023-25 budget, Gov. Evers and the legislature agreed to \$2 million in funding over the biennium for the Meat Processor Infrastructure Grant Program. This

grant program will provide \$1.8 million in grant opportunities for meat processors in the 2023-24 biennium, and \$200,000 over the 2024-2025 biennium. Thanks to these programs and the improvements in resiliency and infrastructure that result from them, we are starting to see increased throughput and expanded capacity at meat processing facilities across the state.

DATCP's Meat Talent Development Program is another initiative making positive changes in Wisconsin's meat industry. This year, eight campuses within the Wisconsin Technical College System launched meat training curriculums, with more courses being offered this fall. One such program is the Humane Handling Institute, a first-of-its-kind training curriculum offered by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls focusing on humane livestock handling, stunning, and equipment maintenance. Together, these programs are helping bolster the meat industry's workforce and are fostering our state's next generation of meat processors.

According to DATCP's Division of Food and Recreational Safety (DFRS), 15 new meat processing businesses have become licensed in Wisconsin over the past year. If not for the investments of the Governor and the meat processors putting those dollars to good use, we would not be where we are with this growth. These hardworking and passionate processors are helping the industry keep up with consumer demand. They are doing this while producing a wide array of goods, ensuring consumers will have a wide selection of quality artisan meats to choose from for their next Packer party, family dinner, or campout.

As we head into fall, I encourage all Wisconsinites to support your local producers and processors by stocking up on a variety of meat products to enjoy throughout the holiday weekend and beyond. After all, what is a summer celebration in Wisconsin without a juicy brat, burger, steak, rack of ribs, or hot dog to enjoy? Sit back, relax, and eat up, Wisconsin!