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Covid 19 has exposed some of the weaknesses in the US meat supply chain. There is a shortage of federally-inspected slaughterhouses. The current “one-size-fits-all” meat safety regulations put small producers and processors at a disadvantage. In response, Congress has introduced (or re-introduced) three bills, aimed at giving both livestock producers and consumers more options. These are the Direct Act, Prime Act, and Ramp-Up Act.

DIRECT

The Direct (Direct Interstate Retail Exemption for Certain Transactions) Act would allow meat processed in state-inspected establishments to be sold across state lines via e-commerce. Currently state-inspected meat (with few exceptions) can only be sold intrastate. Since state meat inspection is “at least equal” to federal standards, why state-inspected meat can’t already be sold across state lines remains a bafflement. Twenty-three states do not have state meat inspection programs, so the Direct Act would not directly benefit producers in those states. The Direct Act is supported by industry groups such as the American Sheep Industry Association.

The Prime (Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption) Act would loosen regulations to allow meat such as beef, pork, goat, or lamb from custom kill plants (not state or federally-inspected) to be sold to consumers, restaurants, hotels, and grocery stores. It would allow states to pass their own legislation that could open up custom-exempt facilities for commercial slaughter/processing. Currently, a producer can sell a live animal to a customer and deliver it to a custom plant for processing, but pieces of the carcass cannot be sold by either the producer or the customer. The meat is stamped “not for resale.” Various industry groups oppose the Prime Act because it would allow uninspected meat to be sold. Custom slaughter is exempt from continuous inspection; only the facilities are inspected to ensure they meet standards for sanitation and product labeling. Small producers claim the Prime Act would level the playing field. On-farm poultry and rabbit slaughter is already exempted from continuous inspection. The American Sheep Industry Association neither supports nor opposes the Prime Act.

PRIME

RAMP-UP

The Ramp-Up (Requiring Assistance to Meat Processors for Upgrading Plants) Act would provide grants (up to \$100,000) to help existing meat and poultry processors move to federal inspection and be able to sell their products across state lines. It would give processors the tools to become federally inspected facilities, which would widen their customer base while maintaining strong inspection standards. The American Sheep Industry Association supports the Ramp-Up Act.