



April 29, 2020

John William Hellerstedt, M.D.  
Commissioner  
Texas Department of State Health Services  
P. O. Box 149347  
Austin, Texas 78714-9347

Dear Commissioner Hellerstedt,

On behalf of small ranchers and meat consumers across the great state of Texas, we request that the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) temporarily issue a rule change to allow Texas ranchers to sell meat processed at small custom processing plants.

COVID-19 has had a detrimental impact on protein processing plants around the state. In addition, COVID-19 has significantly increased the rate of unemployment in Texas, which has led to a decline in protein sales. In order to reconcile the inability to purchase food due to the financial impacts of unemployment, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has committed \$3 billion to food producers. These producers may submit bids to the USDA for contracts. Food banks, as well as other non-governmental organizations, will be included in the bid process. However, the bottleneck of processing and packing plants for proteins will still exist. If the processing and packing plants issue is not addressed, federal funding will be administered without anywhere for the producers to send their products.

This issue can be alleviated by allowing small ranching operations temporary access to custom slaughter facilities. In addition, this solution would mitigate the disposable income dilemma since the waiver allows meat products for consumers to be processed by their local custom slaughterhouses. These are the same slaughterhouses that process cattle, hogs, deer, and other proteins every day for private consumption.

The DSHS rule concerning "Custom Slaughterers" *Tex. Meat and Poultry Act §221.b.12*, needs to be modified to allow for private citizens, food banks, and other food distribution centers to be able to purchase from these slaughter facilities. This is already done for deer processing, such as where the hunter can direct the processed deer to a nonprofit organization for consumption.

To alleviate these issues that our Texas customers, ranchers, unemployed, and financially stressed individuals are facing, DSHS needs to temporarily allow small customer slaughterers to work with cattle ranchers for a period of 6-9 months. We ask DSHS to either implement a rule change to *Tex. Meat and Poultry Act §221.c.1* allowing existing holders of custom slaughterers to temporarily process meats for sale or that DSHS declare an emergency condition and allow existing custom slaughterers to process meats for sale to third parties.

We ask that DSHS implement a rule change or issue a temporary emergency condition to support Texas consumers and ranchers.

Thank you,



**Senator Charles Perry**



**Senator Pete Flores**



**Senator Bob Hall**



**Senator Jose Menendez**



**Senator Kel Seliger**



**Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr.**



**Senator Lois Kolkhorst**



**Senator Pat Fallon**

CC: Texas Department of State Health Services Meat Safety Assurance Unit, MC 1872  
CC: Lieutenant Dan Patrick  
CC: Governor Greg Abbott