

OPENING TESTIMONY BY JOEL SALATIN
JUNE 13, 2023

Judiciary committee: Subcommittee on the Administrative State, Regulatory Reform, and Antitrust

Where's the Beef? Regulatory Barrier to Entry and Competition in Meat Processing

Right now, nationwide, a farmer wanting to get a slaughter slot in a small federal inspected meat processing plant often must book 6 months to a year in advance. For pork, that's before the piggie is even born. It's never been like this. What happened?

In short, regulatory extortion tyranny. Inspection regulations are size prejudicial. I know one facility that was ordered closed because it wasn't processing fast enough. The Food Safety Inspection Service measures its efficiency by pounds inspected per personnel-hour, creating an adversarial discriminatory attitude toward small plants.

In 1906 when Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* 7 large companies controlled half the nation's meat processing capacity. After a century of government intervention, 4 now control 85 percent. When licenses and compliance make entering and maintaining an abattoir more burdensome to small facilities than large, concentration and centralization is not an anti-trust issue; it's a discriminatory regulatory issue.

It's a perfect example of mission creep. What started sincerely as a food safety objective morphed into regulatory overburdensome harassment. A small plant operator dare not object to subjective and political inspector decisions because "poke and sniff" allows retribution toward folks with questions. Entrepreneurs are enslaved and held hostage by bureaucrats who share no business risk and rule without restraint.

Meanwhile, more Americans desire a more localized, stable, secure, transparent, nutrient dense, relational, trustworthy food supply than centralized industrial facilities offer. We have eager and willing buyers, farmers desperate to direct market to their neighbors, but a bureaucracy that stands in the way of voluntary consenting adults exercising freedom of choice for their body's

microbiome fuel. Few human decisions speak to freedom like what we have a right to swallow.

I can butcher a beef in the field, process it, and give it away. But if I sell an ounce, I'm a criminal. What is it about exchanging money that suddenly makes meat unsafe? Clearly current regulations are not about safety; they are about market access.

Our society recognizes scale and relationship when assessing risk. In Virginia, we can keep 3 daycare children in our private home without licenses and governmental oversight. Why? Because an entity and arrangement that small inherently offers seller-buyer intimacy that vets itself equal to licenses and inspectors. In Virginia, we can keep 3 eldercare patients in our private home without licenses and government oversight. Why? Because such an intimate arrangement protects equal to the government.

Expectations and trust provide context in any transaction. People who want to disentangle from the agri-industrial-governmental crony complex don't expect their provenance to be squeezed through the regulatory process. They trust their farmer more than a government agent. While this group, both farmer and customer, may represent a lunatic fringe of society, we all know that's where innovation comes from. And how a society deals with its unorthodox element defines its march toward tyranny or freedom.

Our society, desperate for food security and stability, wallows in a morass of regulatory impediments to what we need and desire. What remedies exist?

Right now, 1967's PL90-492, known as the "Producer-Grower Exemption," allows 20,000 head of poultry to be processed on-farm without inspection; this has enabled thousands of community-scaled neighbor-to-neighbor entrepreneurs to launch small broiler operations. To my knowledge, not a single customer has been harmed by this exemption. Why not extend it to beef? Pork?

Right now, custom processing designation allows me to sell pre-slaughter portions of an animal, usually in wholes, halves and quarters. Why limit my customers to large volumes? Let them buy by-the-cut—Congressman Thomas Massie's Prime Act would enable this.

Another remedy could simply be a Food Emancipation Proclamation, allowing farmers currently enslaved by regulatory shackles, to sell meat to neighbors. Right now, farmers can give it away; they just can't sell it. Neighbors can buy and feed it to their children. Clearly, if uninspected meat is hazardous, the commerce prohibition should be on the buyer as well as the seller. But it's not, which clearly illustrates the prohibition's hypocrisy.

Surely if we really want freedom of food choice and food security, we can create a remedy that refuses to criminalize neighborly meat transactions. The only reason food freedom was not written into our bill of rights was because our nation's founders could not have imagined a time when neighbors could not exchange a chuck roast or sausage. At some point, requiring professional league infrastructure and referees on a sandlot pickup ball game is both inappropriate and malicious.

It's time to remove the heavy hand of tyranny from America's food system by allowing market access, opportunity, and competition for producers and consumers seeking freedom of food choice.