



NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE

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23RD LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT
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November 13, 2023

Re: USDA Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program Grant (MPPEP)

United States Department of Agriculture:

We are pleased to provide this letter in support of a grant request by a recently formed 501 c (3) non-profit organization, the "Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center." The funding will be used to aid in the construction costs of a new regional livestock processing facility in Warren County, New Jersey.

The proposed facility will benefit the region's livestock producers who currently have no facility to process their cows and pigs in New Jersey. Small facilities in Pennsylvania are unreliable and at capacity and are the only reasonable outlets for producers. This is a major hurdle for a producer who wants to expand their livestock operations and make their farming profitable. This facility is a major piece of agricultural infrastructure that has been lacking for decades. The Warren County Commissioners are supporting the facility and want to see it succeed.

A regional processing facility will enable farmers in the Northwest New Jersey region to expand their livestock operations or to create new operations. Lands that are currently deep tilled for corn, soybean and other commodity crops can be easily converted to livestock pasturing lands which can have considerable environmental benefits. The North Jersey RC&D Council has a Regenerative Farm Network supporting farmers interested in learning and exchanging knowledge regarding regenerative and climate-smart farm practices. These new and expanded operations will have a processing facility in close proximity with adequate capacity to enable them to grow their operations. Livestock producers will have the ability to sell their animals to the non-profit that is running the facility. There is also the option to have the facility process their animals and return finished cuts wrapped for sale under the producer's own brand, thereby increasing economic development for the agricultural industry.

USDA
November 13, 2023
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Following are samples of sustained community impacts and community goals:

- Increasing the region's agricultural infrastructure will benefit the agricultural industry.
- Investment in the agricultural economy is in keeping with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.
- Given our agrarian roots in Northwest NJ, this project will be a beneficial rural business development initiative that will benefit many livestock producers.
- This will create new livestock producers in the region.
- Livestock raised using regenerative practices can improve soil health and overall environmental protection.

We fully support the "Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center's" grant request. We respectfully request that strong consideration be given to the Center's application.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Douglas Steinhardt
Senator

John DiMaio
Assemblyman

Erik Peterson
Assemblyman

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF THE COUNTY OF WARREN**
WAYNE DUMONT, JR. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
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Lori Ciesla, Director
James R. Kern, III, Deputy Director
Jason J. Sarnoski, Commissioner

Telephone: 908-475-6500
Fax: 908-475-6528

November 17, 2023

Via U.S. Mail

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD
Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Re: USDA Grant Application - Northwest New Jersey Food Processing and Innovation Center

To Whom It May Concern:

We understand that Northwest New Jersey Food Processing and Innovation Center has applied for a grant in connection with the proposed construction and operation of a food processing facility in the County of Warren, Oxford Township. Please allow this to confirm that the County is the owner of property in Oxford Township that has been proposed as a potential location for such facility. Please allow this to serve as confirmation and commitment of the County's support for the establishment of a food processing facility in Warren County and, subject to compliance with any constraints, limitations or conditions that may apply under State law, the potential siting of such a facility on County property.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Lori Ciesla

Lori Ciesla
Commissioner Director

James R. Kern, III

James R. Kern, III
Commissioner Deputy Director

Jason J. Sarnoski

Jason J. Sarnoski
Commissioner

TOWNSHIP OF OXFORD

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November 21, 2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD
Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

RE: Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center, Oxford Township, Warren County, NJ

Dear Dr. Neal:

On behalf of the Township of Oxford, I am writing to express our support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center MPPEP grant application under the USDA's Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program.

As the host municipality, we are encouraged to see this meat processing facility being proposed to repurpose Warren County's closed waste to energy facility. The ability to take this property and make it into a productive use that will benefit the region's farming community is something the Township of Oxford supports. The processing facility meets with Oxford Township's long term community goals by helping make sustainable agricultural practices economically viable.

We hope the USDA will fund this grant request. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mr. Gerald Norton
Mayor
Oxford Township

11/6/2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD

Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

RE: Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center, Oxford Township, Warren County, NJ

Dear Dr. Neal:

On behalf of Warren County Community College, I am writing to express our support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center MPPEP grant application.

Warren County Community College (WCCC) is aiding in the development of the Food Processing and Innovation Center. We have agreed to provide education for the employees of the plant, as well as housing a permanent expert in the facility paid for by the college. Warren is providing free consultation for technology implementation within the innovation center.

Having a local USDA inspected meat processing plant in Warren County, New Jersey can bring several benefits to the community and its stakeholders, with sustained impacts that align with the region's long-term goals. Here are some of the potential benefits and impacts of such a project:

- **Job Creation:** The meat processing plant will require a workforce, providing employment opportunities for local residents. This will reduce unemployment rates and contribute to economic stability.
- **Increased Local Income:** Employees of the plant will spend their earnings in the local economy, benefitting local businesses such as restaurants, grocery stores, and more.
- **Supplier Relationships:** The plant will source meat from local farmers, strengthening the agricultural sector and creating demand for their products.
- **Food Security:** This will help to eliminate the food deserts within New Jersey, such as Phillipsburg NJ, where Warren County Community College has a campus.
- **Local Supply Chain:** Having a local meat processing facility ensures a more resilient and responsive food supply chain. This can be especially important during times of disruption, such as natural disasters or supply chain issues.
- **Market for Local Farmers:** Local farmers can sell their livestock to the plant, creating a stable market for their products and potentially improving their income and livelihoods.
- **Opportunities for Skill Development:** The presence of the plant will create opportunities for vocational and technical training programs, educating the local workforce and improving their employability.

Overall, the establishment of a local USDA inspected meat processing plant in Warren County, aligns with the community's long-term goal, while benefiting a wide range of stakeholders in the area.

Sincerely,



Dr. William Austin

President



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
PO Box 330
TRENTON NJ 08625-0330

PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

TAHESHA L. WAY
Lieutenant Governor

JOSEPH ATCHISON III
Assistant Secretary

November 21, 2023

USDA Rural Development Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program

To whom it may concern:

As Assistant Secretary of Agriculture fulfilling the role of Secretary, I am submitting this letter of support for the "NW New Jersey Food Processing & Innovation Center, Greenfield Processing Plant," as well as detailing the various segments conducted by the state and showing the critical need of funding for this project in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) identified the critical need of all New Jersey red meat livestock producers in early 2019 and commenced studies to establish and expand processing for individual producers for custom-labeled processed meats and the potential of house-branded products for the community of livestock producers that did not want to or could not direct market on an individual basis.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension Board of Managers also reviewed the needs of the state. Both agencies conducted livestock summit outreach meetings to producers with unprecedented attendance, interest, and follow-up questions. From the various outreach efforts, it was apparent that multiple models were being discussed by the producer clientele to help satisfy the processing needs lacking within the state.

In March 2019, NJDA submitted a Rural Business Development Grant Application to conduct "A Comparative Analysis and feasibility study of three models of processing facilities to serve NJ livestock farmers." With this awarded grant, NJDA was able to solicit the services of Keystone Development Center (KDC), a member of the USDA-supported Mid-Atlantic Food Cooperative Alliance (MAFCA)

The Rural Business Development Grant award evaluated three distinct livestock processing models:

1. New regional processing facility
2. Expansion of an existing processing facility
3. On-farm processing facility development and expansion

Those producers who indicated willingness during the various livestock summits were encouraged to continue their input during this process. Many aspects of the project were completed. With the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, the study was not able to fully identify all aspects originally identified for the study. (study results attached).

Upon completion of the KDC portion of the project, NJDA and Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) identified various segments of the study that needed additional research and development. In March and April 2021, a survey of livestock producers across the state was conducted to determine the essential needs (study results attached).

During fall 2021, an outreach by the Department to individual producer businesspeople was conducted. Select producers who had extensive business development experience were given the opportunity to step forward to lead the project to establish what was considered the best option for the state's processing needs and establish one or two regionally centered livestock processing facilities.

From the continued work, the proposed livestock harvest and processing plant is now sized at 4,200 beef cattle, 1,200 hogs, and 7,200 lambs and goats per year housed in a facility of approximately 24,500 square feet (32,000 square feet with animal pens) with a scope of harvesting 25 beef units per day. Though small in the grand scale of processing, this will be a considerable support facility for processing both custom harvested and labeled meats and meat products to serve regional livestock producers that direct sell meats to consumers, as well as establishing a direct wholesale market for a producer house-branded product for all the species.

This potential product being funded will also serve as training for the agriculture industry, community college, and local vocational programs, with a classroom designed into the plant.

As you can see from the supporting documents and the application, this has had extensive study and support from multiple state and federal agencies in support of the New Jersey livestock industry. Our continued support of such a project is warranted to sustain a local sustainable food supply, while promoting environmental stewardship.

Again, I wish to convey the support of the state and this Department in the funding of this grant application to its fullest extent possible.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Joe Atchison III", followed by a stylized flourish or underline.

Joe Atchison III



Because Agriculture Matters!

168 West State Street, Trenton New Jersey 08608

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Email: mail@njfb.org
Website: www.njfb.org

November 17, 2023

To: Ms. Karama Neal, administrator
USDA Rural Business Cooperative Service

From: Allen Carter, president

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AC', is written over the 'From:' line.

Re: Northwest New Jersey Food Processing and Innovation Center

The New Jersey Farm Bureau firmly supports the above-noted project and all federal/state grant funding that may be available for it. This endorsement was confirmed by formal action of our board of directors earlier this week.

In brief, we believe that commodity processing centers of this type are vital to the future economic well-being of farming in New Jersey. Processing enables the farm-based production of commodities to realize a value-added status that substantially increases the revenue generated to meet the myriad costs in the food cost supply chain. Whether it be livestock-vegetables-floriculture-fish or whatever, production ag farmers and fishermen need processing.

In addition, we like the organizational planning and feasibility work behind this project. It is significant to note that there will be a non-profit entity in control of the project's operation, enabling much-needed flexibility in the management of the business. This will help avoid pitfalls that have plagued similar projects in other states, and should give confidence to grantor agencies that larger public policy goals like economic development, sustainable food supply and environmental health will be at the heart of this project.

Farm Bureau is the largest general farm organization in the state (6,400 members) and nation (5.5 million members) whose mission is to promote the economic and social betterment of our members. This project will accomplish that.

Thank you for your attention to our views.

#

Cc: NJ State Board of Agriculture
Office of the Governor
Office of Sen. Cory Booker
Warren County Board of Commissioners
Warren County Board of Agriculture



NEW JERSEY BEEF INDUSTRY COUNCIL

676 Woodglen Road, Glen Gardner NJ 08826
Telephone 908-303-7367

November 20, 2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD.
Administrator, USDA Rural-Business-Cooperative Service

RE: Northeast Food Processing & Innovation Center
Oxford Township, Warren County, New Jersey

Dear Dr. Neal,

On behalf of the New Jersey Beef Industry Council, I am writing to express our support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center MPPEP grant application.

The application and its goals of reestablishing a regional livestock USDA slaughtering and processing facility in northern New Jersey would be a tremendous asset to the livestock industry in northern New Jersey and the state as well. Over the last thirty years, custom slaughter and processing facilities have dwindled in the state to the point that New Jersey producers have had to go out of state to get their livestock slaughtered and processed to facilitate retail sales to local consumers. This fact alone has hampered the expansion and development of all the livestock industry just by the constraints alone of not having a facility to slaughter and process animals on a regular basis in the state.

It is imperative as well, that the grant include both USDA slaughter and USDA processing to fulfill the needs of New Jersey's livestock potentials for retailing meats directly to consumers.

USDA inspected slaughter and USDA inspected processing go hand in hand to fully achieve a vertically integrated livestock meats delivery system.

The development of a facility in northern New Jersey would greatly increase the potential for increasing livestock numbers and new producers in the region, along with the increased viability of the New Jersey livestock industry.

Sincerely,

Robert Mickel
Executive Director
New Jersey Beef Industry Council
676 Woodglen Road
Glen Gardner, New Jersey 08826
remickel@comcast.net
908-303-7367





November 20, 2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD
Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Re: Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center, Oxford Township, Warren County, NJ

Dear Dr. Neal:

On behalf of North Jersey Resource, Conservation & Development (North Jersey RC&D), I am writing to express support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center MPPEP grant application.

North Jersey RC&D is a regional 501(c)3 agricultural non-profit with 35 years' experience working with farmers in Northwestern New Jersey. Our organization works at the forefront of soil health and regenerative agriculture practices in the region, leading both a Regenerative Farm Network focused on supporting farmers learning and working closely under a NRCS Climate Smart Commodity Opportunity focused on providing technical assistance and marketing opportunities for 20 grass-fed livestock producers.

Through these projects, farm product diversification and the transition to sustainable rotational grazing is encouraged; management practices that rely on local, high-quality livestock processing facilities to be successful. The lack of a regional processing facility is a major hurdle for producers to be able to expand their livestock operations and make their farming profitable. It is also a major hurdle that prevents new and beginning farmers from entering the industry or diversifying their operations.

The need for livestock processing capacity in New Jersey is long-standing and significant. Producers continue to mention the need for additional livestock processing opportunities. Producers are currently required to haul livestock out-of-state for processing under USDA inspection in order to sell direct to consumer. Farmers are faced with significant logistical hurdles including capacity and scheduling challenges which, if left unaddressed, could result in a significant diminution of both current and future opportunities for the industry.

The development of an in-state, regional processing facility will not only support continued livestock operations in New Jersey but it will also encourage growth, farm diversification, and

pasture management and grazing conservation practices. These practices support improved soil health, improved water quality, as well as, additional ecosystem benefits.

Thank you for your consideration of this much needed project. Investing in agricultural infrastructure will benefit not only the farmers and agricultural industry in New Jersey, but the resiliency and sustainability of our New Jersey food system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Tessieri", with a stylized, cursive script.

Laura Tessieri
North Jersey RC&D Executive Director



State of New Jersey

Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council
100 North Road (Route 513)
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PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

TAHESHA L. WAY
Lt. Governor

CARL J. RICHKO
Chairperson

BENJAMIN L. SPINELLI, ESQ.
Executive Director

November 8, 2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD
Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Subject: Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center, Oxford Township, Warren County, NJ

Dear Dr. Neal:

On behalf of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) I am writing to express our support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing and Innovation Center MPPEP grant application.

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency that works in partnership with municipalities and counties in the 860,000-acre Highlands Region to encourage a comprehensive regional approach to implementing the 2004 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Act) and associated Regional Master Plan (RMP). Implementation of the Act and RMP occurs through municipalities and counties via grants to conduct planning, engineering, and design activities that promote the preservation of natural resources, protect the quantity and quality of drinking water that serves over 70% of New Jersey residents, and ensures the economic viability of the Region. Our 2021 Economic Sustainability Plan recognized agriculture and agritourism as one of the Region's leading economic producers, though the industry is continually threatened by development. The continued economic viability of the industry hinges on providing the appropriate value added and support services to remain profitable.

Recently, the Highlands Council awarded six agricultural sustainability grants worth a total of \$650,000 in this fiscal year. Recognizing the urgency of this project the Highlands Council awarded the largest sum of \$150,000 to the Northwest Food Processing and Innovation Center. This project will bolster the Region's agricultural infrastructure by creating a USDA inspected livestock processing facility within proximity of the state's largest cattle producers while reducing the need for out-of-state processing which is both logistically challenging and resource intensive.

The Highlands Council fully supports this project for sustaining and enhancing the viability of agriculture in the New Jersey Highlands, supporting long-term economic growth, and promoting the protection of natural resources. We look forward to continuing our relationship with Northwest Food Processing and supporting one of the largest industries in the Highlands Region.

Sincerely,

Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq.
Executive Director



Duke Farms, a Center of the Doris Duke Foundation
1112 Dukes Parkway West
Hillsborough, NJ 08844

November 14, 2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD
Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

RE: Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center, Oxford Township, Warren County, NJ

Dear Dr. Neal:

On behalf of Duke Farms, a Center of the Doris Duke Foundation, I am writing to express our enthusiastic support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center MPPEP grant application.

As an organization committed to environmental stewardship and strengthening local food systems in New Jersey, we strongly believe this project will benefit our region's agricultural community. Currently, the lack of USDA-inspected processing facilities in the state forces farmers, including Duke Farms, to transport animals long distances out of state for slaughter and processing. This is inefficient, costly, and environmentally taxing.

The development of the Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center would fill a critical gap in our regional food infrastructure. It would allow livestock producers to expand their operations and improve their profitability by utilizing a local processing facility. New farmers would be encouraged to raise livestock knowing they have a nearby USDA-inspected option for processing. This strengthens our local food system and reduces food miles.

Furthermore, we believe the facility will advance environmental goals by enabling more farmers to adopt regenerative grazing practices. Pasture-based livestock systems have been shown to benefit soil health, carbon sequestration, and water retention when properly managed. The facility would remove barriers to raising livestock on pasture.

In sum, the Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center strongly aligns with Duke Farms' mission of environmental stewardship, agricultural innovation, and community education. We fully support this catalytic project and urge you to fund the MPPEP grant application. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further information.

Sincerely,

Jon Wagar

Deputy Executive Director for Operations and Sustainability, Duke Farms



November 6, 2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD
Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

RE: Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center, Oxford Township, Warren County, NJ

Dear Dr. Neal:

On behalf of the Foodshed Alliance, I am writing to express our support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center MPPEP grant application. The Foodshed Alliance is a non-profit organization based in Hope, NJ, that works to strengthen sustainable farming, increase access to local, healthy food, and protect the environment for all members of our communities. We work to increase land access to farmers, and we create market-driven solutions for getting locally produced farm food to people in our own region.

We offer our full support for the development of a much-needed USDA-inspected livestock processing facilities in northwestern New Jersey. Currently, livestock producers throughout the state that market products directly to consumers are required to haul livestock out-of-state for processing under USDA inspection. In its own right, the inefficiency of this current process is unsustainable, but we are now also faced with significant additional logistical hurdles including capacity and scheduling challenges which, if left unaddressed, could result in a significant decrease of both current and future marketing opportunities.

We agree this project will:

- Increase economic development for the agricultural industry.
- Increasing the region's agricultural infrastructure will benefit the agricultural industry.
- Invest in the agricultural economy in keeping with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.
- Create a rural business development initiative that will benefit many livestock producers.
- Create new livestock producers in the region.
- Encourage the use of regenerative practices to raise livestock that can improve soil health and overall environmental protection.

The development of new in-state processing capacity will assure that our state's local meat producers continue to be successful now and into the future. And it ensures that our communities will have ready access to locally produced meat.

Sincerely,

Kendrya Close
Executive Director
Foodshed Alliance

Warren County **BOARD of AGRICULTURE**

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November 16, 2023

To whom this may concern,

The Warren County Board of Agriculture is writing this letter in support of a Livestock Processing Facility in Warren County.

Sincerely,

James Bischoff

James Bischoff, President
Warren County Board of Agriculture



November 7, 2023

Ms. Karama Neal, PhD
Administrator, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

RE: Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center, Oxford Township, Warren County, NJ

Dear Dr. Neal:

On behalf of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA NJ), I am writing to express our support for the proposed Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center MPPEP grant application.

NOFA NJ is a 35+ year-old nonprofit 501(c)3 organization focused on supporting organic & regenerative farming and food systems in the Garden State. NOFA NJ provides hands-on training and resources to beginning and experienced farmers and gardeners, advocates for policy that supports farmers and protects the environment and engages the public to support healthy and organic food systems throughout NJ.

One of the priority needs of New Jersey's agricultural community is a local USDA-inspected meat processing plant. Currently, countless producers travel several hours each way to process their livestock. The lack of a local processor results in lower profit margins, increased emissions, and an overall reduction in local and regional food security. Further, the ability to access a local facility will allow more and smaller farms to increase their production and access the marketplace. Small and beginning farmers often lack the infrastructure and economy of scale to allow for the transportation of livestock outside of their local area.

NOFA NJ earnestly supports the efforts of the Northwest Food Processing & Innovation Center and eagerly awaits the much-needed resource for the benefit of New Jersey farmers, ranchers, and consumers alike.

Sincerely,

Devin Cornia
Executive Director
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey

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