



## Bill aims to help bring local meat to wider markets

BY JULIA BAYLY  
BDN STAFF

Sen. Angus King and Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky introduced legislation this week that aims to help small farms and ranches provide locally raised meat and poultry to consumers by giving states the freedom to create a “custom processor category” for meats sold in state.

The Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption Act, or “PRIME” Act, mirrors House legislation co-sponsored last year by Rep. Chellie Pingree.

Current federal and Maine laws

exempt custom slaughter of animals from federal inspection regulations, but only if the meat is slaughtered for personal, household, guest or employee use.

The PRIME Act would give states the freedom to permit intrastate distribution of custom-slaughtered meat to consumers, restaurants, hotels, boarding houses and grocery stores.

As it stands, anyone raising and wanting to sell beef, poultry, rab-



King

bits or any other meat must have it processed at one of 13 U.S. Department of Agriculture or state-inspected facilities in Maine, and that can make it tough for beef producers in rural parts of the state.

“In Maine, a growing number of consumers are looking to buy locally produced meats,” King said. “It simply defies logic that a Maine farmer has to send their animals halfway across the state when they just want to sell the meat next door.”

Those distances create burdens for many of Maine’s meat producers.

“If we want to sell individual cuts of meat, we have to go three

hours away to have it processed,” Erin Parisien of Aroostook Beef Co. in New Canada said. “It would be tremendously helpful to us if there was something closer.”

Janice Bouchard, who with her husband, Joe Bouchard, raises beef and owns Bouchard’s Country Store in Fort Kent, said distance equals cost.

“It would be easier if we didn’t have to go as far,” Bouchard said. “Right now we have to go downstate to deliver [the cows] and then two weeks later go back down and get it again.”

The PRIME act, according to King, would provide states with

the option to develop and implement regulations creating a third custom processor category for meats to be sold in state.

“By providing states with the option to regulate the processing and local sale of meats, the PRIME act will restore a measure of common sense to the process, support Maine’s farmers and bolster the local foods movement, all while protecting consumer safety,” King said.

At the state level, the proposed federal legislation could reduce some regulatory red tape.

“The legislation proposed by  
*See Meat, Page C2*



KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN

A cluster of farmers, spinners and students gathered at Wolfe’s Neck Farm in Freeport to learn to shear sheep. The beginners class is taught by the Maine Sheep Breeders Association and University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

## From sheep to shawl

### Wool workers flock to Maine shearing school

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

The first rule of sheep shearing school: Don’t put your hands in their mouth.

They may look cute, but sheep kick, bite and can bleat your ears off. And they are jumpy — especially when an electric cutter is buzzing around their head.

It’s little wonder that Brandon Woolley, one of Maine’s top shearers, says: “The life expectancy of shearers isn’t all that long. They get worn out. It’s tough on your body, it’s tough on your back, it’s tough on your legs and arms.”

The physical demands of this age-old skill didn’t deter a barnful of farmers, spinners and students from learning to shear recently at Wolfe’s Neck Farm in Freeport. Professional shearers guided them through the springtime fleecing of the flock. The Maine Sheep Breeders Association and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension hold workshops every spring when sheep need to be shorn.

The goal is to remove the animal’s wool in one fell swoop, which is easier said than done. You have to catch them, calm them, flip them and grab the shears. Sheep shearing is not for the weak or pain averse. Before lunch, one woman walked away bloody, another bruised.

The working life trajectory of shearers ends at about 50, but as with tech jobs, upstarts are getting into the game.

Some, like a college student attendee, hope to start a business.

“There seems to always be a need for qualified shearers to get out there and harvest the wool,” said Richard J. Brzozowski, a food system program administrator at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension who was facilitating the class. “It’s an interesting skill. Even if you don’t end up becoming a professional shearer, you do know about wool.”

Watch the video  
bangordailynews.com

That’s what attracted Pamela Sweetser, who raises a “spinner’s flock” of 11 in Presque Isle. She has heritage breeds and spins her wool into hats and scarves under her Snow Country Creations label. But with just one shearer in Aroostook County, she figured it was time to learn.

“I like to partake in all aspects of wool,” said Sweetser, who rattled off the steps it takes to get from sheep to shawl.

After a hands-on instruction with Woolley, it looked like she aced it. But without getting the wool off in one piece, leaving behind what’s called second cuts, she bagged the fluffy, white fleece and admitted sheepishly, “I’m a long way off from shearing wool that’s worth using.”

Maureen Fleming, who has a Shetland sheep farm in New Hampshire, also wants to know more. She is selling fleeces to fiber artists and needs quality wool.

After wrestling with a sheep, she tried her hand and had a workout in the process.

“The trick is to gently handle the animal to keep them quiet and calm. Make them feel they are safely held in place and



KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN

Pamela Sweetser of Presque Isle learns to shear a sheep with help from shearer Brandon Woolley. The beginners class was held recently at Wolfe’s Neck Farm.

don’t have the option to bolt,” she said. “There is no substitute for the experience of someone who’s been shearing thousands of sheep.”

With those numbers dwindling in Maine, and some farmers taking their sheep miles away to get fleeced, the more trained, the better.

“Shearers are dropping by the  
*See Sheep, Page C2*

## Young gardener lauded for growing giant cabbage

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

BELFAST — Last spring, Belfast third-grader Tanner Carson brought home from school a small cabbage seedling that appeared to be on its last legs, and planted the sad-looking specimen in his mother’s garden.

What happened next was epic. Tanner’s sickly seedling — “it was really practically dead,” he said — came back to life with a vengeance. The 9-year-old watered it carefully and marveled as it grew, and grew, and grew some more. By late August, the huge green cabbage had taken

over an entire bed of the garden, and when the family harvested it, the head alone weighed a massive 28 pounds.

“I think gardening is  
really, really fun.”

TANNER CARSON

Although the vast quantities of coleslaw and soup provided by the cabbage are now just a memory, Tanner recently was thrilled to learn that he is being recognized for being a cracker-jack young gardener. At the end of the growing season, he was selected by teachers at the Cap-

tain Albert Stevens Elementary School in Belfast for having grown the best cabbage in the third grade. Then, his name was entered in a statewide drawing, and was randomly selected by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to be the state winner for Bonnie Plants’ national cabbage program, and will receive a \$1,000 savings bond from the plant company as a prize.

“When I heard the news I jumped into my happy dance,” Tanner said.

In addition to the money, Tanner and his mother agree that he gained something else important

from the cabbage experience: a real appreciation of gardening.

“I’ve never seen a kid so proud,” Salmon-Carson said of her son and his cabbage. “It’s definitely sparked his interest.”

Bonnie Plants, based in Union Springs, Alabama, is one of the largest producers of vegetable and herb plants in North America. For 13 years, the company has brought free oversized O.S. Cross cabbage plants to third-grade classrooms across the country whose teachers have signed up for the Cabbage Program. Last year, more than 1.5 million kids in 48 states tried  
*See Cabbage, Page C2*



MEG SALMON-CARSON

Last year, Tanner Carson grew a cabbage so large the head alone weighed 28 pounds. Tanner recently was named the Maine state winner in the Bonnie Plants Cabbage Program.