

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Max Taylor 271-1403

HB 779-FN, allowing the sale of rabbit meat in intrastate commerce.

Hearing Date: April 1, 2025

Time Opened: 10:49 a.m.

Time Closed: 11:00 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators McConkey, Pearl, Watters and Rosenwald

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Avard

Bill Analysis: This bill allows for the sale of uninspected rabbit meat in intrastate commerce.

Sponsors:

Rep. Verville
Rep. Comtois
Sen. Pearl

Rep. Ammon
Rep. Creighton

Rep. J. Aron
Sen. Murphy

Who supports the bill: Representative Judy Aron (Sullivan County District 4), Robert Johnson II (NH Farm Bureau), Representative Peter Bixby (Strafford County District 13)

Who opposes the bill:

Who is neutral on the bill: Erica Davis (NH Department of Health and Human Services), Michele Roberge (NH Department of Health and Human Services)

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative Peter Bixby

Representative Strafford County District 13

- Representative Bixby introduced HB 779-FN, which expands the current law allowing rabbit meat sales to restaurants by permitting sales at farms, farm stands, and farmers markets.
- He stated the bill was initially flawed, but was fully reworked in committee.
- Representative Bixby explained rabbits are considered a non-amendable species by the USDA, so only state food safety standards apply.

- He stated the bill mirrors the 2014 restaurant statute and requires sellers to be trained through cooperative extension, register with food protection services and the department of agriculture, and comply with labeling requirements.
- He stated the bill allows up to 1,000 rabbits per year be sold directly from the new locations, in addition to the 1,000 allowed for restaurant sales.
- Representative Bixby stated he worked with DHHS to ensure the amended bill met all safety standards.
- Senator Pearl asked if this bill simply expands the existing restaurant program.
 - Representative Bixby confirmed, stating that requirements remain the same.
- Senator Pearl asked if any foodborne illness had been reported from restaurant rabbit sales,
 - Representative Bixby stated he was not aware of any. He added that rabbit meat spoils quickly in frozen storage, making long-term freezing unsuitable.
- Senator Rosenwald asked about risks like tularemia, fungal, or parasitic illnesses from rabbit meat.
 - Representative Bixby deferred to DHHS and said such risks are likely addressed in training workshops.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition: None.

Neutral Information Presented:

Michelle Roberge & Erica Davis

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services

- Ms. Roberge stated that DHHS is neutral on HB 779-FN, noting that their previous concerns about public health were addressed in the bill's amendment.
- Ms. Davis explained the bill expands legal rabbit meat sales from restaurants to farms, farm stands, and farmers markets.
- Ms. Davis noted the original bill conflicted with existing law and lacked training and registration requirements. However, the amended version now includes both and aligns with current food safety standards.
- Senator Rosenwald asked what education would be done by DHHS or by the Department of Agriculture.
 - Ms. Davis explained that education is provided through a collaborative training hosted by UNH Cooperative Extension, with participation from DHHS and USDA.

- Senator Pearl asked if there is a current statute that does not allow rabbit sales directly from farms.
 - Ms. Davis confirmed that current statute only allows rabbit meat to be sold to restaurants.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 3, 2025