

## Meat Processors Wary Of Plan

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A proposed change to meat safety guidelines could spell trouble for processors across Iowa and the country.

Processors say it will increase their costs without improving food safety. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, however, maintains that it is a good move.

The USDA proposal would require more testing for microbial elements in meat.

According to Jay Wenther of the American Association of Meat Processors, microbial elements are organisms related to spoilage.

"If consumed, the (spoilage organisms) are not going to harm you. Processors pasteurize to kill harmful pathogens, but not to kill spoilage organisms," Wenther said. "If you test anything in your fridge, it's going to have some kind of spoilage organisms."

But the USDA says the spoilage organisms are "indicator organisms" whose presence correlates to harmful pathogens.

Wenther disagrees.

"Right now, it won't make anything safer," Wenther said. "It's so non-science based and non-statistical based. Currently, no scientific peer-reviewed paper says a reduction in indicator organisms equals a reduction in harmful pathogens."

He said the changes would be more of a burden on small processors, but "this isn't a big plant versus small plant issue."

"All plants are opposed to this entire issue," he said. "(The plants) want the status quo until the federal government can pinpoint a problem that needs to be addressed."

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Jeff Hodges, owner and operator of Minden Meat Market in Minden, Iowa, says proposed new regulations would be cost-prohibitive for his business.

Caleb Weaver, a USDA spokesman, said the draft proposal released by his agency "does not impose any additional requirements, and its purpose is to help establishments comply with existing requirements."

Jeff Hodges, owner and operator of Minden Meat Market, said the guidelines would require more testing, a move that would be cost-prohibitive.

"I have eight years of scientific data that backs up my work. We have to keep all these records, now (the USDA) is saying they're no good," Hodges said.

Hodges estimated that if the proposed guidelines are passed, he would have to spend around \$200,000 on testing the first year and around \$80,000 each year after that. Those are amounts he can't afford, Hodges said.