



Reindeer Herders Association
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Chair Schatz and Vice Chair Murkowski,

The Reindeer Herders Association (RHA) of Kawerak, Inc., the tribal non-profit corporation serving 20 Inupiaq, Yup'ik and St. Lawrence Island Yupik tribes across the Bering Strait region of Northwest Alaska, is grateful for the opportunity to submit written testimony supporting Vice Chair Murkowski's work on the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization.

The RHA represents the interests of 18 Alaska Native reindeer herders, who collectively manage over 20,000 reindeer on the Seward Peninsula, as they have continued to do for many generations. Reindeer herding, with the food and knowledge sharing it promotes, is an integral part of the cultural fabric of many of our communities, in addition to providing a key source of food security for 31 tribes in the Bering Strait and Northwest Arctic regions. RHA herders speak fondly of growing up with parents and grandparents out on herd grazing ranges and seek to pass this cultural knowledge on to their descendants.

However, reindeer herding has been hampered for decades by significant restrictions on the herders' ability to provide reindeer meat products, and, thereby, their ability to sustain their operations. Field slaughter for reindeer is currently regulated under the Alaska Food Code, which provides that reindeer may only be sold in carcass sections and may only be processed in below-freezing temperatures during the winter. While herders have found limited success under these requirements, providing a sustainable pathway to achieving USDA inspections would be a significant win in sustaining reindeer operations with higher-value products, and would be a significant win for food security in the region.

To this end, the RHA voices strong support for the 'Improving ARCTIC Act,' as introduced by Vice Chair Murkowski and its provisions that expand tribal compacting authority under USDA programs, while broadly promoting food security for tribes. The RHA will always advocate increased flexibility and decision-making authority in USDA programs, with appropriate recognition for the government-to-government relationships that exist therein.

More specifically, the RHA supports the amendments regarding the Federal Meat Inspection Act (21 U.S.C 601) and the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 under the proposed language of the Improving ARCTIC Act, Title VIII, Section 801. These provisions that expand tribal compacting authority to carry out USDA meat inspections in our region will be a potential game-changer for our reindeer herders in their ability to create value-added products for sale in the region and beyond. Beyond the language of this proposed legislation, the RHA would advocate for permanent funding support for the program and reasonable flexibility in the provisions requiring tribal food codes, as to allow for appropriate decision-making differences from tribe to tribe.

The RHA appreciates the efforts of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization and looks forward to continuing efforts to advance tribal food security.

Thank you for your time,

Nathan Baring

Nathan Baring
Program Director of Kawerak's Reindeer Herders Association