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WASHINGTON, D.C., Feb. 20 -- U.S. Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kans.) today cosponsored legislation which would enable meat processing plants in small communities to remain open.

The measure would amend the Federal Meat Inspection Act which became effective last December. According to the Department of Agriculture, the Inspection Act forbids custom butchering and the processing of meat for retail sale in the same plant. Kansas and 44 other states have been given additional time to comply with the law.

Dole, who is a member of the Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee, explained that the inspection law would cause many small meat packing plants to close. "Custom butchering," he said, "is a major source of income for these small plants." The meat processed for these small plants is purchased from the larger, federally-inspected plants, he said.

The proposed amendment would allow custom butchering, under prescribed sanitary conditions, to be done in small plants which also process for retail sale. The meat processed in these plants for retail use would have to be from federally-inspected meat.

Dole commented, "Closure of the small plants would cause an economic hardship for the areas they serve."