

## USDA Announces More Than \$43M Investment in Meat and Poultry Processing Research, Expansion and Innovation

**Press Release**

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**WASHINGTON, March 9, 2023** – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today an investment of more than \$43 million in meat and poultry processing research, innovation and expansion in support of its ongoing efforts to transform the food system at every stage along the supply chain. This investment is funded through the American Rescue Plan and the [Agriculture and Food Research Initiative](#) (AFRI).

As part of this total investment, the [University of Arkansas](#) was awarded a \$5 million grant from the AFRI Center of Excellence for Meat and Poultry Processing and Food Safety Research and Innovation (MPPFSRI). In addition, \$13.9 million in grants from the Meat and Poultry Processing Research and Innovation – Small Business Innovation Research Phase III – program were awarded to [14 small and mid-sized meat and poultry processors](#). These grants are administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Additionally, one \$25 million [Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program](#) (MPPEP) grant was awarded to Wholestone Farms for a major plant expansion in Fremont, Nebraska. This grant was administered by USDA Rural Development.

“Farmers rely on technology to become more efficient and profitable,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “Under the Biden-Harris Administration and through historic funding investments, USDA continues to invest in research processing expansion that will create new and better markets and expand opportunities for small businesses and rural communities. This investment will help enable that vision.”

The AFRI MPPFSRI program promotes novel approaches to meat and poultry processing by implementing pioneering production system technology that assesses risk management and overall enhanced food safety. The University of Arkansas, Center for Scalable and Intelligent Automation in Poultry Processing, will incorporate basic and applied research in meat and poultry processing and food safety to promote technological innovation and decrease industry barriers to safety and processing.”

As part of the MPPFSRI Phase III funding investments, prior Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) or Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) awardees with relevant technologies were invited to apply for this funding opportunity. Selected awardees must provide non-restrictive access or non-exclusive licenses to any technologies or related enabling technologies developed under this award to help small and mid-size processors implement the technology.

Examples of NIFA's 14 funded MPPFSRI Phase III projects include:

- Biotronics Inc. of Ames, IA, developed and commercialized technology with funding from USDA SBIR Phase I and Phase II grants that uses ultrasound scans for measuring backfat, muscle depth and intramuscular fat in its products. With this new funding, Biotronics will optimize its technology for small and mid-size packers to reduce operation size and costs, streamline processes, and minimize plant installation. Biotronics will validate online scanning and carcass processing, install a compact prototype system, and train plant operators for scanning and maintenance procedures. Biotronics will work with a small packing plant, The Pork Company LLC, Warsaw, NC.
- Halomine, Inc., of Ithaca, NY, developed an antimicrobial coating with grants from USDA and the National Science Foundation (NSF) SBIR that significantly improves poultry and meat processing sanitation technology and important food safety advances. The coating, HaloFilm, neutralizes harmful pathogens and prevents biofilms on various surfaces within the poultry and meat manufacturing

environment, thus reducing the incidence of foodborne illnesses and increasing productivity. With this funding, Halomine will perform pilot studies and trials working with Steadfast Farms, LLC, Bethlehem, CT.

- Cinder Biological, Inc., of San Leandro, CA, will extend work from its NSF SBIR work to improve meat and poultry sanitization. The technology incorporates natural enzymes from volcanic springs to produce the world's most acidic and heat stable enzymes. Daily use of synthetic chemicals causes accumulation in the environment, in aquifers and wastewater flows, and can impact worker safety. Using this more natural system will reduce the use of ammonium-based disinfectants, improve food safety and reduce occupational hazards in meat and poultry processing operations. Cinder Biological, Inc. will partner with Cream Co. Meats, Oakland, CA.

RD's MPPEP investment:

- Wholestone Farms, with headquarters in Fremont, NE, is a cooperative owned by 195 independent pork producers that employs over 1,000 plant professionals and 200 office workers. The proposed plant expansion will add approximately 112,000 square feet directly connected to the existing facility, which will include an 89,000 square foot cut floor and 23,000 square foot rendering building. The expansion will enable second shift operations and add approximately 950 new jobs. Second shift operations will double the processing capacity.

"Investments like these will deliver long-term improvements in meat and poultry processing practices to benefit consumers, farmers and the environment," said Vilsack. "We are excited to see how these investments will generate solutions that benefit all Americans."

#### **Background**

The MPPFSRI Phase III objectives are to rapidly deploy emerging technologies and make applied research more accessible to independent business owners, entrepreneurs, producers and other groups, such as cooperatives and worker associations who are less resourced. The areas in which technological developments were solicited address three areas prioritized by the Secretary: monitoring and improving complex processes, worker safety and food safety.

MPPEP was designed to support capacity expansion projects in concert with other private and public finance tools. For more information about MPPEP, view the [Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program page](#).

NIFA invests in and advances agricultural research, education and Extension across the nation to make transformative discoveries that solve societal challenges. For more information visit, [www.nifa.usda.gov](http://www.nifa.usda.gov).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, promoting competition and fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

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