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LB 1092

SENATOR ROBAK: Thank you, Mr. President and members of the body. I am pleased to present LB 1092 and this is a bill that would start a pilot program for state meat inspections, and I'd like to thank the Agriculture Committee and Senator Dierks for the committee for letting us discuss the merits of this state meat inspections. There's been a lot of talk over the last year about the need for Nebraska to add value to its agriculture. According to Merlyn Carlson, our Department of Agriculture director, Nebraska ranks forty-third in the country for adding value to its raw commodities. That means, even though our farmers work very hard, they don't keep as much...they don't get to keep as much of the value of their products as farmers in other states. A state meat inspection program would help remedy that. It would allow farmers to keep more of the dollar they put into their livestock production in their pocket. You should all have a handout that says LB 1092 on the front. Referring to the pink sheet, Minnesota is a state that just recently adopted this state meat inspection program. They actually began their program in November of 1998, and the reason they started...and the reason they started...they stated for starting a state meat inspection was to help smaller meat producers and processors market their meat locally. If meat were processed by a state inspected plant rather than processed by a custom-exempt plant, producers would be able to sell their meat to local restaurants. They could sell their meat to local grocery stores. Custom-exempt lockers are lockers where the animals are processed for their owners. A farmer will bring in a hog for slaughter and processing, and will take the meat home for his consumption. The meat is not to be resold. They could even develop their own label under this bill. For example, "Farmer Jones" might label his product as "Sandhills Beef" and, since you live in his community, you would know that "Farmer Jones" only waters his cattle with Long Pine spring water and that makes "Sandhills Beef" more flavorful. If his market were state inspected you could walk into your local market and find "Sandhills Beef" and you would know that you were buying from "Farmer Jones", and I think that is an important part of the value-added component of this type of bill. We would allow local farmers to market directly to their friends in their local communities. In addition, a restaurant could serve meat that is raised in their communities, so we keep the dollar in the local