Conducting Plant Tours
Introduction

Hosting tours of your plants and facilities for Members of Congress and their staff can help build relationships and increase awareness about the work you do and the important role you play in your community. Site visits provide unique opportunities for lawmakers to meet constituents, learn about the complexities of meat production and processing, and hear about the impact of public policies and regulations on your business. These visits serve to showcase your company’s role in the member’s district and demonstrate the meat and poultry industry’s commitment to producing the safest, most affordable, abundant, and varied meat supply in the world.

This guide will help you plan and conduct successful tours of your facility, while offering tactics to establish and maintain meaningful connections with your elected representatives and local media. The guidelines presented in this document are strictly advisory and are meant to provide an overview of items to consider when deciding if hosting a plant tour is appropriate. In addition to this guide, Meat Institute staff are ready to assist you with any aspect of scheduling, planning, and conducting a successful plant tour.

Remember, the primary goal of these visits is to establish and maintain meaningful, constructive relationships with your elected officials by providing insights about the work you do.
Scheduling the Plant Tour

Decide who to invite: You may choose to invite the House member representing your district, his or her staff, Senators representing your state, their staff, or a combination. The Meat Institute's Legislative Affairs department communicates with various Members of Congress and their staff on a daily basis. Please contact us if you would like to discuss how and when to approach a Member of Congress for a visit.

Send an invitation: It is often most effective to submit a request for a site visit in writing to a member’s office (see page 6 for a sample letter). The invitation letter includes the purpose of the visit, a proposed date, and the time required for the visit. Consider following up with a phone call to the member’s district or state office to confirm that the invitation was received and to discuss the proposed date and time.

Make a plan: Explain, in either the initial invitation letter or a subsequent follow up to the Congress member’s office, what you hope the member will gain from the experience, such as a better understanding of the meat industry or steps meat companies take to produce safe, wholesome products. It is usually best to propose an itinerary that details logistics of the tour, what members can expect to see, and time allotted to make remarks and greet constituents. Let the member’s staff know who from your organization will attend the site visit. You may also wish to develop a contingency plan in the event that transportation, weather, equipment issues, or other factors hinder the visit.

Communicate logistics to the member’s staff: Reach out to the member’s staff coordinating the visit to discuss and receive approval for your proposed plan. The Meat Institute can help you determine the best staff contact and assist in the plant tour planning and approval process. Inform staff of safety precautions, including any protective wear, that you will provide and will be required during the visit. You might also mention any noises or smells the member may experience, and describe what they can expect to see, including carcasses and stunning, in slaughter facilities. Consider sharing the Meat Institute's “Glass Walls” video series with the lawmaker’s office to better prepare them for what to expect during a visit to your plant.

Contacting a legislator’s office:
Congressional offices have numerous staff members with very specific roles. To find the contact information for a scheduler or other office personnel, please feel free to get in touch with the Meat Institute’s Legislative Affairs department.

Remember that a plant, with its sounds, environment, and safety equipment, can be daunting to those who have never seen it. What is commonplace to you may not be obvious to your guests. You can attempt to preemptively address some of these concerns by providing an accurate preview of the tour. Conducting a thorough, insightful site visit and recapping the experience to ensure you conveyed what you hoped to present can leave an impactful, positive impression with your guest(s).
Preparing for the Plant Tour

Distribute an internal memo to employees that informs them of the lawmaker’s visit and encourages them to attend.

Select a group of employees for an internal planning committee, if necessary, that would be responsible for organizing and executing the event.

Determine a location in advance where the lawmaker can speak to constituents, respond to questions from reporters, and deliver remarks. Decide on the best setup for your space, including signage, seating, and audiovisual arrangements.

Choose and brief tour guides: Decide who will lead the plant tour and provide them with a general script detailing the points to be covered. As always, work with safety and technical staff to determine the best tour route. Create name badges for guests and staff attending the tour. If required, ensure that proper safety equipment will be available to participants at the scheduled time of the tour.

Consider preparing materials, if you do not already have them, that describe your business – its economic and community history and impact, number of employees, amount of meat and poultry produced or processed, and other interesting facts. If you intend to influence the lawmaker’s stance on specific legislation or policy, explain the impact of the particular policy on your day-to-day operations, employees, and constituents who reside in the district. If you compile an information packet, consider including applicable Meat Institute resources in the packet. Meat Institute staff can send any relevant resources, and we are happy to assist in reviewing and writing these materials.

Draft remarks that will be delivered by the appropriate staff person – a CEO, a plant manager, or another employee. Effective statements typically welcome guests to the event, describe the company, introduce the lawmaker, and address relevant topics. When preparing these remarks, try to research the legislator’s background and positions on meat and poultry industry issues. Meat Institute legislative affairs staff can assist your research efforts and help provide this information. Perhaps use these remarks as an opportunity to share personal stories that explain ways your business and the meat and poultry industry are affected by the actions they take. You may decide to write talking points that underscore topics such as your company’s products, employee retention efforts and benefits packages, number of workers and facilities, safety and training programs, and other details. In addition, you may address your company’s economic and community impact, including philanthropic efforts, and its role in international trade, if applicable. Meat Institute public affairs staff can work with you to draft and review the statement.

Develop questions to ask the legislator. These can include inquiries about existing or pending legislation and regulations. Think about incorporating questions that allow lawmakers to learn more about your company and the industry. You might ask about ways you can provide assistance and input when issues arise that may impact your operations. Assign a team member to take notes and keep a record of any questions that may require follow-up with a legislator’s staff. Meat Institute legislative affairs staff can offer suggested questions to help you prepare for this discussion.
Planning for Media

Consider inviting media: You may choose to invite media to the site visit. Prior to doing so, ensure that you receive approval from the lawmaker’s communications staff. Inviting media may provide photo opportunities and generate positive press for your business, the lawmaker, and the meat and poultry industry. Be sure to inform media about where they will be allowed to film and the safety precautions that are required. Meat Institute public affairs staff is available to help guide your media outreach efforts.

Draft a media advisory: Once you have confirmed the visit, consider drafting a media advisory (see page 7) containing the date, time, location, and brief description of the event. Send the advisory as part of a press kit that includes relevant information about your company. You may also wish to prepare an op-ed or letter to the editor from your CEO to a local newspaper if the visit is aimed at influencing a member’s position on specific policies or regulations that affect your company. Share these materials with the Congress member’s staff before distributing to media. Meat Institute public affairs staff can draft the advisory and assist you in compiling and distributing press kits.

Provide your own photographer to take pictures of the visit. This can ensure you control where photos are taken and guarantees you have pictures to share following the event if media is prohibited from having cameras on-site.

Conducting the Tour

The exact steps involved in conducting a tour largely depend on your facility and employee structure. The following are general guidelines that can help you run an organized, efficient site visit.

Gather employees and distribute nametags.

Welcome the guests on arrival and proceed either to the specified location for the discussion portion of the site visit or to the tour itself, depending on the pre-approved schedule. Deliver prepared remarks with your talking points during the discussion portion of the event, as noise on the plant floor may preclude a meaningful dialogue. The Member(s) of Congress will typically speak at this time and field questions from reporters and constituents. Distribute safety equipment prior to the tour, if required.

Use the tour script you prepared to explain your facility’s operations; showcase new technologies, equipment, and products; and highlight your employees’ responsibilities. Consider keeping the tour group small – Congress Member, their staff, and a few employees – if operations on the plant floor tend to be loud.

Take photos to distribute to media; post on your social media accounts, to your website, and in employee communications; and share with the legislator.
Send a thank you note: After the visit, send a thank you note to the member(s) and their staff. You may decide to include photos from the event, and offer to provide information and expertise if issues arise that relate to the meat and poultry industry.

Share feedback about the tour with Meat Institute staff, including photos, press clips, and ways we can assist in the future.

Maintain a relationship with the legislator: Monitoring the lawmaker’s position, votes, and statements on issues relevant to your business and the meat and poultry industry could help you provide guidance and information to Members of Congress and their staff when attempting to influence the development and outcome of proposed policies and regulations. Don’t hesitate to contact the Meat Institute legislative affairs staff for background about a Congress member’s positions on pertinent policies and consider participating in one of our grassroots advocacy campaigns when issues arise that concern you. Express appreciation when lawmakers support your positions as part of a continuous effort to build and maintain relationships with your elected officials.

Hosting a site visit is one of the most effective means to give Members of Congress and the media a glimpse into the work that is involved to produce a safe, wholesome, affordable, and abundant meat and poultry supply that feeds millions of Americans as well as people around the world. We hope that you found this guide useful and are always available to assist you in executing any of the tactics presented in this document. Don’t hesitate to contact us with any questions you have about hosting a successful, informative site visit.
[Date]

The Honorable [Insert Congress member’s name]
United States House of Representatives/United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515/20510

Dear Representative/Senator [Insert Congress member’s last name]:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a plant tour at [Company name]. [Insert two to three sentences describing your company: discuss what you produce, the number employees at your plant, how much you export, etc.]

This tour offers a unique opportunity to learn about our facility, view our operations first-hand, and speak with our employees. Refreshments will be provided. The entire event should take approximately [estimated time].

Below is a list of suggested dates and times:

• [Insert date and suggested timeframe]
• [Insert date and suggested timeframe]
• [Insert date and suggested timeframe]

I would be happy to work with your scheduler to find a date and time that works well for you. Alternatively, I will follow up on this request in the next week. Assuming you are able to join us, I would also be pleased to work with your press secretary and communications staff to invite local media to cover the event, if you wish.

[Company name] is a member company of the North American Meat Institute (Meat Institute), a national trade association that represents companies that process 95 percent of red meat and 70 percent of turkey products in the U.S. and their suppliers throughout America. As a Meat Institute member, we take pride in doing our part to produce the safest, most affordable, abundant, and varied meat supply in the world.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of this invitation. You or your staff can reach me directly at [insert phone number and e-mail address]. I look forward to welcoming you to our plant.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Organization]
For Immediate Release
Contact: [Company Contact], [Contact Phone Number], [Contact E-mail]

[NAME OF COMPANY] TO HOST [NAME OF CONGRESS MEMBER] ON [DATE]

What: [Name of company and city, state] will host [name of lawmaker] for a plant tour [date], as part of an effort to make legislators more aware of the significant impact meat and poultry production and processing have in [insert district or state, depending on which members are attending]. The visit provides a unique opportunity for [insert lawmaker’s name] to meet some of [his/her] constituents who make up a portion of the more than 500,000 hardworking Americans who work in meat and poultry plants to produce our nation’s safe, nutritious, and affordable meat and poultry supply.

The member of Congress will receive a first-hand look at [give a brief description of what the lawmaker will see during the tour] and offer brief remarks to company employees.

[Give a brief one or two sentence description about your company]. [Company name] is a member company of the North American Meat Institute, a national trade association that represents companies that process 95 percent of red meat and 70 percent of turkey products in the US and their suppliers throughout America.

Who: [Name of lawmaker and company name]

Where: [Company name], [Address], [City, state, zip]

When: [Date and time]

Include a note at the end of the advisory if there are certain restrictions media should expect or procedures they will be required to follow.
Contact Us

At the Meat Institute, grassroots advocacy is a joint effort between the Public Affairs and Legislative Affairs departments. For questions or more information, please contact a representative of either of the departments:

Emily Reed
Manager
Legislative and Member Services
(202) 587-4222
ereed@meatinstitute.org

Michael Schumpp
Director
Public Affairs and Member Communications
(202) 587-4251
mschumpp@meatinstitute.org