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Introduction

As meat and poultry packers, processors and suppliers, you are acutely aware of ways federal policies and regulations affect your business. Actions taken by lawmakers in Congress and regulators in federal departments and agencies can profoundly shape the way you operate and directly impact your bottom line.

While some laws and regulations benefit the U.S. meat and poultry industry, others prove onerous, ill-conceived, or simply unnecessary. Your voice and engagement on issues important to the meat and poultry industry can make an impactful difference with influencers on Capitol Hill, in federal departments and agencies, and in the media.

The meat and poultry industry is the largest segment of U.S. agriculture, directly employing more than 500,000 hardworking Americans while supporting millions of jobs in ancillary industries. Together, you are responsible for producing the safest, most affordable, abundant, and varied meat supply in the world.

The Meat Institute’s legislative staff interact with Congress on a daily, ongoing basis. In addition to acting on behalf of the meat and poultry industry as a whole, we are happy to work with you and assist in developing communications that provide a personal point of view to your members of Congress.

What is grassroots advocacy?

Grassroots advocacy involves efforts to influence legislators and government officials through citizen mobilization and participation. Grassroots advocates can build awareness about an issue, support or oppose specific legislation and regulations, and generate local media attention, among other actions. The efforts of advocates help bolster the lobbying and legislative activities carried out by the Meat Institute on a daily basis.

Why is grassroots advocacy effective?

Members of Congress care about the impact of policies on their districts and states. Constituents (the individuals residing in a lawmaker’s district or state) make the best advocates because they are able to personalize and localize issues in ways that connect with their representatives. Constituents know the districts and states in which they live, and they may have cultivated relationships with a member and their staff. Most importantly, constituents vote for elected officials and can determine whether a member keeps their seat in government.

Preparing to become an advocate

The North American Meat Institute (Meat Institute) works each day to defend and promote the interests of the meat and poultry industry and the millions of Americans who work tirelessly to ensure its success – but we can’t do it alone. We rely on advocates like you to help educate and encourage government officials and lawmakers to implement policies and regulations that will strengthen the companies and employees involved in meat and poultry production and processing.

This guide is designed to provide you with information and strategies to become an effective advocate for your business and our industry. We provide a brief summary of the federal legislative process and detail ways you can influence and communicate with policymakers and the media. Meat Institute staff are always ready to discuss issues that concern you and support your grassroots engagement activities.
Congress & Legislation: An Overview

### Senate
- 100 members
- Serves 6-year terms
- State-wide election

### House of Representatives
- 435 members
- Serves 2-year terms
- District election

### Types of Legislation

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<tr>
<th>Authorizing Legislation</th>
<th>Appropriating Legislation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishes, renews or repeals programs/agencies</td>
<td>Must be enacted annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines rights/responsibilities</td>
<td>Provides precise funding amount allocated for specific programs/agencies</td>
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<td>Sets limits on amount of funds spent annually on programs</td>
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### Federal Legislative Process

1. **Introduction & Referral**
   - Bill introduced by Senator or Representative
   - Assigned to committee
   - Referred to appropriate subcommittee if necessary

2. **Committee Review**
   - Subcommittee may hold hearings and/or amend the language; vote is held to move forward
   - Committee may hold additional hearings/markups before considering bill and voting
   - If approved, bill is reported to full House or Senate and added to calendar

3. **Moving Forward**
   - In Senate, leaders of majority & minority parties agree by at least 60 votes to schedule full Senate debate on a bill
   - In House, the Rules Committee sets a rule governing time limits for debate on a bill and how amendments can be added

4. **Floor Debate**
   - Full Senate debates bill and may amend it; final vote is held, bill is sent to House if not already approved
   - Full House debates bill and may amend it based on rules; final vote is held, bill is sent to Senate if not already approved

5. **Presidential Approval**
   - Conference committee reconciles differences between bills. Compromise bill is returned to House & Senate for vote
   - After approval by House & Senate, the President signs or vetoes the bill
   - Congress can override veto by two-thirds majority in both House & Senate
Grassroots Tactics

Preparing to Deliver Your Message

Studies by the Congressional Management Foundation consistently show that constituent outreach has the greatest impact on elected officials’ decisions and actions. But before you take action on a specific issue that could impact your business and the broader meat and poultry industry, first determine who you should contact to ensure your message reaches the appropriate decision-maker(s). At times, the Meat Institute will call on its members to provide grassroots support to increase our efforts to encourage lawmakers and regulators to align their positions and proposals with meat industry priorities. During these mobilization campaigns, the Meat Institute provides sample e-mail templates and guidelines to assist you in contacting members of Congress and other officials. Even if there are not active campaigns created by the Meat Institute, our staff is eager to help you reach out to lawmakers as a constituent.

Who to Contact

When a proposal emerges on Capitol Hill that could affect your business, either positively or negatively, it is easy to get overwhelmed by the number of offices available to contact. Reaching out to your own member(s) of Congress often makes the most sense. Occasionally, it may prove more effective to contact a member of a Congressional committee, such as the Chair or Ranking Member, to influence legislation and proposals while they are being developed.

No matter which Congressional office you contact, you will likely talk to a staff assistant who will take down your message and provide it to the appropriate staff member and the member of Congress. In most Congressional offices, Legislative Assistants (LAs) handle content areas and play a central role in providing knowledge, information, and policy ideas to Representatives and Senators on a range of issues. If you are able to discuss your concerns with an LA, keep in mind that they are often able to influence members’ stances on issues.

How to Deliver Your Message

Now that you have a better idea about who to contact, it is important to review some of the tactics that, whether carried out individually or as part of a larger effort, will have the most influence on Capitol Hill. The most commonly used and impactful tactics are listed below.

Write a letter or email
Make a phone call
Schedule an in-person meeting on Capitol Hill or in the member’s District Office
Attend town hall meeting and local public events in the district and/or state
Invite a member of Congress to tour your plant or business
Write an op-ed or letter to the editor of local papers
Communication Best Practices

Although your messages will vary depending on the issue at hand, there are certain communication best practices that prove effective when communicating with your member of Congress and his or her staff. These tips can be applied to both written and verbal communications.

First, identify yourself as a constituent to establish a connection to the member and strengthen the potential impact of your message.

Always state the purpose for your outreach and communicate a specific request, sometimes referred to as an “ask.” These “asks” can encourage members to support or oppose legislation in committee or on the House and Senate floor; to co-sponsor a piece of legislation; to support or oppose a program’s continuation; or to devote more attention and resources to a specific issue, among other possibilities.

Be prepared to defend your ask with facts, data or your experiences that stress the local implications of an issue for a member’s district or state. Providing details about your facilities, number of employees, and other data could help members and their staff contextualize the impact of certain policies and regulations. Anecdotal evidence can complement the facts you provide and can produce a more personalized, effective message.

Most importantly, approach the interaction with the goal of building a relationship with the Congressional office you are contacting. If you disagree with a member’s position, explain your reasoning with calm, clear, and well-prepared arguments, even if the member has taken an opposing position. Don’t forget to end each communication by thanking the staff member or lawmaker for taking the time to listen to your viewpoint, and ask for a response to your inquiry if necessary.

Influence of Advocacy Strategies

Select data from Congressional survey reflecting the level of positive influence gained by advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office of a member who does not already have a firm decision on an issue.
Written Communications

Congressional offices receive a large volume of letters, e-mails, phone calls, and visits from constituents each day. By following the previously outlined communications best practices and reviewing the tips presented in the next few pages, you will be better equipped to ensure your message stands out. The Meat Institute can help provide guidance and background information to include in your message.

E-mail and Letters

E-mail is preferable to hand-written letters if you choose to write your member of Congress. Traditional mail takes much longer to process – sometimes as long as three weeks – given security protocols on Capitol Hill. With that in mind, you should avoid mailing a letter if the issue is urgent.

Personal letters and e-mails from individual constituents have a greater impact and receive more attention than pre-printed materials and form letters, identical letters that allow minimal customization.

The best written communications are:

Direct, Concise, Specific
 Identify yourself as a constituent. If you are sending an e-mail, include your full mailing address somewhere in the body of the text to indicate that you live, or that your business is located, in the member’s district. Clearly state the subject of your correspondence and try to keep the letter/e-mail to one page. If you are writing about legislation, remember to state the name and number of the bill. Keep in mind that the most effective communications address one issue at a time to avoid diluting your message.

Factual & Informative
 Support your position with fact-based arguments and evidence. Cite ways the issue will impact the member’s district or state, and how it will affect your facilities and employees. Include information about your company as well as research, statistics, and other hard data you may have to support your message. It is also wise to include any personal anecdotes that strengthen the points you make to increase relatability and humanize the issue at hand.

Constructive & Appreciative
 Written correspondence should avoid argumentative language that will only undermine your specific request. If your lawmaker has taken an opposing position, express why you disagree by building a constructive, fact-based argument. Offer to provide additional information and focus on building a relationship with the member and their staff. Remember to thank your lawmaker for considering your viewpoint.

A Note About Email:
 Responses to e-mail messages vary by office. Some offices send automatic replies to confirm that they have received your correspondence. Depending on the office, a more specific reply may be sent via e-mail or by regular mail.
Phone Communications

Phone Call

Calling your Congress member’s office can also be an effective way to communicate your position and request specific action on issues that affect your business and our industry. Meat Institute staff are able to assist you in drafting talking points, collecting supporting data and preparing for a call to a member’s office.

The following guidelines will help ensure a successful call:

Preparing for the call: Collect information and formulate talking points prior to the call. Know the issue you wish to discuss, draft a few compelling facts, and craft a concise, direct “ask.” Writing down these points will help you stay on message and focus your call. Once you know what you plan to say, find your legislator’s office phone number on his or her website or call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121. If you are unsure about who to contact, visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov to find your Congress member(s).

Making the call: Identify yourself as a constituent and explain why you are calling, then ask to speak to the staff member who handles the issue or topic you are referencing. If that is not possible, proceed to deliver your prepared remarks to the staff assistant who answered the call. Confirm the lawmaker’s position on the issue, and clearly state your request. Thank the staff member for taking the time to speak with you, and ask for an issue area LA to return your call if you were not able to speak with someone familiar with the topic.

After the call: Continue to monitor the lawmaker’s position and actions related to your issue. Follow up with any requested supporting materials or supplemental information. If you are expecting a response from the office, please note that offices can sometimes take up to a few weeks to return calls.

Sample Script for Phone Call on NAFTA

Identify yourself and explain your relationship to the district:

“Hello, my name is ___ and I am a [beef/pork/turkey producer/packer/processor, etc.] in [Congress member]’s district. May I speak to the staff member who handles trade issues for the Congressman/woman (or Senator)?”

Reintroduce yourself and explain why you are calling:

“I am calling to ask Congressman/woman (or Senator) ___ to support the North American Free Trade Agreement and want to preserve the hard-fought gains for U.S. meat and poultry workers and businesses.”

Detail why the issue is important to you; provide facts and personalize your appeal.

“NAFTA has greatly increased market access for U.S. meat and poultry products and has driven robust industry growth, which in turn supports hundreds of thousands of jobs like mine in communities across America. NAFTA is essential to the continued economic strength and future growth of this industry and the millions of consumers who depend on us to produce the safest, most affordable, highest quality meat and poultry supply in the world.”

Ask your member of Congress to support your stance on the issue:

“I urge you to encourage the Administration to commit to NAFTA in ways that preserve and expand upon the gains achieved by the meat and poultry industry and its workers.”
Local Media

Generating Local Media Attention

Members of Congress and their communications teams care about and monitor local media coverage. While direct communication with your representative’s office remains the most effective way to ensure your message gets across, efforts to generate local media attention are also impactful. You can consider writing letters to the editor and op-eds to local papers, or you may choose to invite reporters to visit your facility.

To increase the chance that your message reaches the appropriate influencers, maintain a list of local media outlets that accept written submissions and conduct interviews – daily, weekly, or monthly papers; local TV and radio stations; and online news sites or blogs covering local politics. The list should include key contacts at each organization, with a particular focus on individuals who most frequently cover issues pertinent to the meat and poultry industry.

Once you’ve compiled this information, it’s important to regularly monitor the different outlets for news stories on relevant topics. As mentioned previously, some possible ways to respond include:

**Letters to the Editor**: Letters to the editor are usually short – 150 to 200 words – pieces that respond to an event or a story that ran in the paper. You can use letters to dispute inaccurate claims, reinforce positive stories or findings, and encourage lawmakers and government officials to take certain actions, among other possibilities.

**Opinion-Editorials**: Op-eds are typically longer – around 500 to 750 words – than letters to the editor and present a clear, factually-supported argument on a specific topic. An op-ed does not have to respond to a story published in the outlet; instead, it can raise a new point and provides a creative way to present a relatively unedited, undiluted message. The most effective op-eds incorporate facts, data, and other research findings to bolster the views of the author.

**Inviting media to site visits**: It may be helpful for media professionals to see your operations to debunk common myths or provide crucial background knowledge before issues arise. Regardless of the reason for the invitation, it is important that you establish parameters prior to the visit and that you communicate certain safety procedures that must be followed on site. Meat Institute public affairs staff are available to assist you in preparing for media visits to your plant.
In-Person Meetings

A well-prepared in-person meeting with your legislator or their staff is the most effective means to convey your message. The Meat Institute legislative affairs team is available to help you coordinate a meeting in your representative’s Washington, DC office. You can also arrange a meeting in your member’s district office, if you are not able to travel to Washington.

Before the Meeting

Schedule the appointment:
Request a meeting in writing.
Explain your connection to the district/state and what you plan to discuss. Include a list of potential attendees and propose a date and time. Requests should be made at least two to four weeks in advance. Once you have sent your written request, follow up with a phone call to confirm that the office received your request and to discuss meeting logistics. If the legislator is unable to attend the meeting, ask that the relevant Legislative Assistant be present to discuss your concerns.

Prepare in advance:
Review your legislator’s biography on their website. Meat Institute staff are available to help you research your member’s position and voting record on the issue, compile facts and other compelling information, and draft talking points for the meeting. Prepare materials to leave behind with the legislator or staff, such as fact sheets or a memo summarizing your position – keep these brief.

During the Meeting

Arrive on time and be patient in the event your legislator or his or her staff member is running late.

Introduce yourself, and have others in the group do the same. State where you reside in the district and establish your connection to the policy issue. Keep this short, as you may only have a few minutes to deliver your message.

Deliver your talking points in a clear, concise way and directly state your request – support or oppose legislation, co-sponsor a bill, increase funding for your issue, etc. Personal stories can be compelling, but have some facts to support your position.

Respond to questions from the legislator or staff member. If you do not know the answer to a question, offer to follow up with the response. Leave materials that summarize your key points and provide your contact information.

Thank the legislator or staffer for meeting with you.

After the Meeting

Send a thank you note shortly after your meeting and use it as an opportunity to restate your points. Remind and thank the legislator or staffer for any actions they agreed to take on behalf of the issue.

Offer to provide assistance and further information, if needed. Include responses to questions you were unable to answer during the in-person meeting.

Follow up approximately three weeks after the meeting to learn more about the lawmaker’s stance on the issue and intended actions, if those points were not communicated to you during your meeting.

Do not be surprised if you meet with a Legislative Assistant, even if you were scheduled to meet with the lawmaker – members of Congress have busy, frequently-changing schedules, so flexibility is key.
Engaging members of Congress and other government officials on social media is often one component of a larger advocacy campaign. Every member of Congress now has an official Twitter, Facebook, or other social media platform. These accounts may be managed by the members, communications staff, or both.

In a survey conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation, 80 percent of Congressional staff said that as few as 30 tweets or Facebook comments about an issue would cause them to take notice. That same survey revealed 35 percent of staff would pay attention to 10 or fewer comments. Seventy-five percent of staff believe social media improves the relationship between lawmakers and constituents, by enabling more meaningful interactions.

Although fewer posts may be required to garner attention and generate a response, social media communications should still be personalized and customized to a specific issue. Not all members place the same emphasis on social media engagement, but most view social media activity – posts, comments, and other interactions – as a barometer of public opinion.

Here are some tips about how to maximize social media as part of grassroots efforts:

**Follow**
Check Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other commonly used platforms to find your members’ official accounts. You can visit his or her website and search the homepage for social media icons, which will often bring you to the official pages when clicked.

**Monitor**
Keep an eye on these social media pages and speak up when appropriate. Members may post policy positions, votes, bills, district and state visits, survey questions, and other important information to their accounts. This will give you timely, first-hand knowledge when issues arise that could impact your business and the industry.

**Engage**
Some members will seek feedback from constituents in the form of surveys or comments. You can “tag” members in tweets and posts to raise awareness about a topic, ask for a specific action, or thank them for supporting your position. Take these opportunities to provide constructive thoughts on issues that interest you. Remember to keep posts informative and respectful.

If you invite a member to your facility, you can use social media to post about the visit. Before you post anything, be sure to share the content with the member’s communications staff.

Social media can also be used simply to stay informed about members’ actions, or to keep track of town halls and similar events members intend to hold in your community.
Setting up a Site Visit

Conducting 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. 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 on your business. The Meat Institute has developed a guide to help you plan an effective site visit, but the information below provides some tips to get you started.

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. Submit the request for the site visit in writing. Include a proposed date and the time required for such a visit, as well as a brief description of your business and employees. Follow up with a phone call to the member’s office to discuss the date and time, and to review logistics.

Make a plan: Outline the visit and explain what you hope the member gains from the experience – a better understanding of the meat industry, steps meat companies take to produce safe, wholesome products, etc. Include an overall itinerary that details logistics of the tour, what members can expect to see, and time allotted to make remarks and greet constituents. Let the staff know who from your organization will attend the site visit. Have 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 staff coordinating the visit to discuss and receive approval for your proposed plan. Inform staff of safety precautions, including any protective wear, that will be required during the visit.

Consider inviting media: Ensure that you receive approval from the lawmaker’s communications staff to have media on site during the visit. Inviting media to the site and into your facility 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.

Send a thank you note: After the visit, send a thank you note to the member(s) and his or her staff. Include photos from the event, and offer to provide information and expertise if issues arise that relate to the meat and poultry industry.
Federal Agencies & Regulations

Influencing Federal Regulations

Executive branch departments and agencies are tasked with translating law into policy. The federal regulatory process provides an additional opportunity to influence the development and implementation of regulations that could impact your business. The public is invited to submit comments on proposed regulations that are published in the Federal Register.

The Meat Institute regularly submits comments in response to proposed regulations and will alert our members when we do so. Our regulatory and scientific affairs staff is available to provide assistance should you wish to draft and submit your own set of comments.

You may also decide to call or write a member of Congress or an official at a federal department or agency to express your views about proposed and final regulations. When contacting lawmakers and government officials about federal regulations, follow the communications strategies listed under the letter writing and phone call sections in this guide. Be sure to cite the docket number and title of the regulation, present your position and the reasons for supporting or opposing the action, and deliver a clear, direct “ask.” Again, this is something that the Meat Institute staff does on a regular basis and can help you prepare.

Agencies that Commonly Work with Agriculture

- AMS
- APHIS
- FNS
- FSIS
- U.S. Trade Representative
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:

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