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USDA

Dear Sirs,

I am Bill Phillips, owner of Rocket City Meats & Seafood. Rocket City Meats & Seafood is a very small processing and distribution plant providing products to the food service trade in the Huntsville Alabama area. I have been in business since 1984 with annual sales of less than \$4,000,000 annually. I employ 15 full time employees who depend on Rocket City Meats for their livelihood. Some of these employees have been with me for a long time. I'm 68 years old and have been in this type of business for 50+ years. I've been with large companies, medium sized companies and now I have my own small company.

The regulations being imposed on my company make it difficult to comply and makes me question whether I should close or sell the business. However, no one wants the headache of running an inspected plant such as this one. In the larger organizations they can afford to assign a person or a department, depending on the size, to handle all the aspects of inspection. This puts a heavy burden on the small business. I understand that there needs to be safeguards but can't we streamline some of the reporting. I'm sure there are a number of other small plants similar to mine that you will never hear from, they will just close. It is very difficult to compete with large corporations as most suppliers don't want to deal with small businesses and we have to pay a higher price because we cannot order in large enough quantities to get the price breaks. Consequently, we either have a lower margin or the larger companies can sell at a lower price, sometimes lower than what we pay for product, and that's how they take our business away.

I would think that the USDA could find the source of the E-Coli problem that is occurring today. I feel that it's something that the animal eats. In order for the carcass to be infected the intestine has to be punctured during processing, so how does the E-Coli enter the intestine. It seems that we are trying to solve this problem with the cart before the horse. Tests run on the same batch of trimmings are coming back with mixed results, some positive and some negative at all levels of testing. I'm told that E-Coli 0157-H7 is more prevalent at different times of the year and my question is why. A cow is what it eats, grass, corn, etc. Are we testing the wrong end of the cow to find the problem? Why don't E-Coli show up in other hooved animals, is it because they don't eat the same food as cows?

I am a meat man not a Harvard graduate but something is wrong with how we are approaching this problem. The business owners in this business do not want to harm anyone. We need to find the cause of E-Coli 0157-H7 before it enters our food chain. Where was E-Coli 0157-H7 10 years ago? Were we ignorant of the problem or has it just happened recently?  
Thanks for your time and any suggestions would be welcome.

Sincerely,

Bill Phillips