

A RESOLUTION to create a special joint committee to study the implementation of a state slaughter and inspection program for ratites.

WHEREAS, meat from ratites (ostrich, emu, cassowary and rhea) is becoming a popular alternative meat food source; and

WHEREAS, it is essential to the public interest that the health and welfare of consumers be protected by assuring that meat and meat food products derived from ratites are wholesome, unadulterated, and properly marked, labeled and packaged; and

WHEREAS, it is also essential to ensure that the preparation of ratite bird meat and meat food products does not result in adulteration of other meat and meat food products that may be produced at the same establishment; and

WHEREAS, in order for ratite meat products to be offered for sale in restaurants, or as packaged meat at retail outlets, such product must originate from an “approved source”; and

WHEREAS, an “approved source” is interpreted by the Tennessee Department of Health as meat products which have been inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA); and

WHEREAS, meat inspection is conducted by USDA in Tennessee, while TDA inspects meat products at the retail level; and

WHEREAS, the present budget of TDA is not adequately funded to implement a comprehensive ratite meat inspection program; and

WHEREAS, USDA is currently conducting an experimental slaughter and inspection program for the ostrich, while regulations governing the slaughter and processing of this ratite are finalized; and

WHEREAS, after such regulations are officially adopted, USDA will conduct ostrich inspections on a “voluntary” basis, i.e., the slaughtering and processing plant will pay an hourly fee for inspection; and

WHEREAS, the USDA has indicated that few revisions in the ostrich regulations would be necessary to implement inspection programs for other types of ratites; and

WHEREAS, at least six (6) states have adopted regulations for the slaughter and inspection of ratites, with most of such regulations being based upon pioneer standards developed by the Texas Department of Health; and

WHEREAS, the ratite farmers of Tennessee feel that it is essential for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture to promulgate rules and regulations relative to the slaughter and inspection of ratites and to expand its meat and poultry inspection program to include the ratite industry; and

WHEREAS, these matters are of vital concern to this rapidly developing agricultural industry in Tennessee, and should be carefully studied by this General Assembly; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That there is hereby created a special joint committee to study the implementation of a state slaughter and inspection program for ratites and the effect USDA standards for ratites would potentially have on such program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the special joint committee shall be composed of the following members: three (3) members of the House of Representatives, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; three (3) members of the Senate, to be appointed by the Speaker of the Senate; and two (2) employees of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture who are knowledgeable in poultry slaughter and inspection and the ratite industry, to be appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That all appropriate agencies of state government shall provide assistance to the special joint committee, upon the request of the chair.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the special joint committee shall be convened by the member with the most years of continuous service in the General Assembly. At its first meeting, the special joint committee shall elect a chair, vice-chair and such other officers that the committee deems necessary.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That all legislative members of the special joint committee who are duly elected members of the 99th General Assembly shall remain members of such committee until the committee reports its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly and shall be paid as members of the General Assembly are paid for attending legislative meetings as provided in Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 3-1-106.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the special joint committee shall timely report its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Ninety-Ninth General Assembly no later than February 1, 1996, at which time the committee shall cease to exist.