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'Equitable restrooms' bill advances in statehouse

By **PETER HANCOCK**
Capitol News Illinois
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A bill that would allow restaurants, hotels and other public places to designate "all-gender multiple-occupancy" restrooms passed out of a House committee Wednesday, sending it to the full House for consideration.

House Bill 1286, sponsored by Rep. Katie Stuart, D-Edwardsville, is similar to one that passed through the House in 2021 but died in the Senate.

"So it just creates the opportunity for places, businesses, universities, you name it, to create a multi-stall gender-neutral restroom, if they so choose," Stuart said during the hearing. "And it lays out requirements for what is in that facility."

In 2019, the General Assembly passed the Equitable Restrooms Act, which identified all single-occupancy restrooms in public places as gender-neutral and designated them for use by no more than one person at a time, or for family or assisted use. But there is currently no law in Illinois authorizing multi-occupancy restrooms to be gender-neutral.

The text of the bill states its purpose is "to promote the privacy, safety, and gender inclusivity of all Illinois residents and visitors," and that the measure should be "liberally construed" to carry out its purpose.

It would require that such restrooms be clearly marked at their entrance with "inclusive signage" that does not indicate any specific gender. It would also require that each toilet stall be separated by dividers and a functioning lock mechanism on the door.

Urinals, if present, also would have to be separated by partitions.

The bill also provides that any multi-occupancy restroom could be converted to an all-gender restroom. But if another multi-occupancy restroom that is designated for a specific gender is located adjacent to or near the all-gender restroom, both would have to be designated as all-gender facilities.

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McDonald's sees value from pork industry partnerships

By **DANIEL GRANT**
FarmWeek

McDonald's, the world's largest restaurant chain, is not only a large end user of pork but also a net exporter of "The Other White Meat."

The Illinois-based company therefore has found great value in partnering with the pork industry to ensure it sources high-quality products in a sustainable system.

Jeff Edwards, manager, U.S. quality systems for McDonald's USA, discussed its work with farmers and the value of pork at the Illinois Pork Producers Association's annual meeting in Springfield. The event kicked off the Illinois Pork Expo.

"We're committed to delivering safe, high-quality products," Edwards said. "How do we do that? We get involved in every step (from the farm to the restaurant).

"We strive to partner with (farmers) as much as possible," he noted. "We understand ag is a good ally."

McDonald's sourced more than 200 million pounds of pork in the U.S. annually as of 2021, with roughly 10% of that coming from Illinois (the nation's fourth-largest pork producer).

Globally, McDonald's consumes about 440 million pounds of pork and serves a wide variety of pork products in an estimated 75 countries. It sources more than 70% of all pork used in the restaurant chain from the U.S.

"We've seen growth in the pork category internationally the last five years, especially with strip bacon. It's become very popular in Europe," Edwards said.

But, while pork products continue to sell like hotcakes,

McDonald's responded to consumers and pressure from non-government organizations to phase out the use of gestation stalls from farms where it sources pork.

So, back in 2012, McDonald's announced plans to purchase pork from farms that phase out the use of gestation stalls by 2022. But, due to animal disease pressure and the COVID pandemic, McDonald's extended the deadline to 2024, with a goal to purchase 85-90% of pork from those farms as of last year.

While the move represented a major challenge to the industry, McDonald's partnered with pork producers and is on track to meet the goal. It purchased more than 90% of its pork from farms that phased out gestation stalls last year.

"We did meet the goal for

2022," Edwards said. "Continued engagement with producers was the difference maker."

McDonald's began sending employees and executives on tours of hog farms to better understand the industry and also implemented animal health and welfare training.

"McDonald's values partnerships. It's engrained in our business model since 1955," Edwards said. "Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from and how it's produced. Engagement allows us to have better, more meaningful conversations."

This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.



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