

Coalition Letter in Support of FY 22 Ag Approps Line Speed Language

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford D. Bishop Jr.
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives DeLauro, Bishop, Granger and Fortenberry:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we urge you to include the following language in the FY 22 Agriculture Appropriations bill directing the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to prevent increased speeds for processing lines in meat and poultry slaughter and processing establishments. Preventing increased line speeds will help protect workers from further injury, as well as protect animal welfare and food safety.

Line speed language recommendation: “None of the funds made available to the Department of Agriculture shall be used to develop, propose, finalize, issue, approve, implement, maintain, or renew any policy, regulation, directive, constituent update, program, waiver, or any other agency action that would allow any official establishment, defined in 9 C.F.R. § 301.2 or 9 C.F.R. § 381.1, to operate without, or in excess of, the maximum line speeds set out at 9 C.F.R. § 381.69(a); 9 C.F.R. § 381.69(b); 9 C.F.R. § 310.1(b)(2); or 9 C.F.R. § 310.1(b)(3)(ii), Tables 1-4; or that would allow any official establishment to reduce or suspend the staffing standards set out at 9 C.F.R. § 381.76; 9 C.F.R. § 310.1(b)(2); or 9 C.F.R. § 310.1(b)(3)(ii), Tables 1-4; or that would otherwise allow any official establishment to increase line speeds or reduce inspection staffing standards.”

Protecting workers from injury and illness is inextricably linked with the production of safe and wholesome food. A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt’s commission to investigate conditions in meatpacking plants resulted in the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA). Today, there is widespread recognition that absent regulation, difficult working conditions in meat

processing are “a constant menace not only to [the workers’] own health, but to the health of those who use the food products prepared by them.”¹

Having recognized that certain regulations are necessary to safeguard worker and food safety, the USDA has exercised its authority under the FMIA and the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA) to help ensure that food products are safe and unadulterated, including by setting limits on slaughter line speeds. Indeed, the USDA Office of Inspector General has found that plants operating at faster speeds “may have a higher potential for food safety risks.”²

We deserve safe food, and America’s meat and poultry slaughter and processing workers and inspectors deserve safe workplaces.

Food workers and inspectors have been risking their health and safety to sustain our nation’s food supply during this pandemic. Frontline essential workers deserve not only our gratitude, but adequate protection and provision for their health and safety, which means slower lines in animal slaughter and meat processing.

Higher-speed slaughter threatens not only the safety of workers and inspectors, but also the enforcement of federal humane slaughter and handling laws and regulations for both poultry and meat food safety.

Jobs inside meat and poultry slaughter and processing are some of the most dangerous and difficult in America, and the risk to food workers and our food supply increases when the line speeds increase. For the sake of the hard-working people who inspect and process the food we eat, as well as consumer protection and animal welfare, we urge Congress to direct the USDA to not increase line speeds at pork, poultry and beef plants.

Thank you for your consideration.

A Better Balance
AFL-CIO
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)
American Sustainable Business Council
Animal Equality
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Blue Green Alliance
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Food Safety
Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc.

¹ 59 Cong. H.R. Document 873, Message from the President of the United States transmitting the report of Mr. James Bronson Reynolds and Commissioner Charles P. Neill, the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Conditions of the Stock Yards of Chicago, June 4, 1906, <https://wp-cpr.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2019/06/rooseveltletter.pdf>

² <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/24601-0001-41.pdf>

Children of Smithfield
Consumer Federation of America (CFA)
Economic Policy Institute
Equal Rights Advocates
Farm Sanctuary
Food and Water Watch
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Government Accountability Project
Heartland Workers Center
Human Rights Watch
Humane Farming Association
Humane Society Legislative Fund
Humane Society of the United States
Interfaith Worker Justice of East Tennessee
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)
International Chemical Workers Union Council (ICWUC)
International Union of Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers
Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee
Knox Area Workers Memorial Day Committee
Mercy For Animals
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC)
Mothers and Others, Justice and Mercy for Immigrants
National Black Worker Center
National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (National COSH)
National Employment Law Project (NELP)
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
Nebraska Appleseed
Nebraska State AFL-CIO
North Carolina Justice Center
Oxfam America
Public Justice
Public Justice Center
Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), UFCW
SafeWork Washington
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)
United Steelworkers (USW)
Unity In Action
Utility Workers Union of America
Workplace Fairness