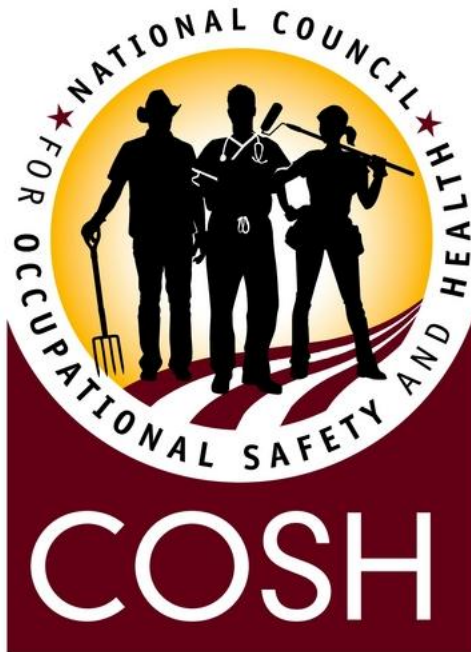


NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH



Impact of line speed on workers and communities

December 20, 2020

Who are poultry plant workers

% US workforce

Black: 11.3%
Latinx: 16.8%
Foreign-born 17.1%

% Poultry processing

37.2%
26.5%
28.1%

Wages - Average \$13.58, Less than \$30,000

11.4% live below the poverty line

Access to health care (Arkansas poultry worker survey):

Most have health insurance but costs are high:

only 22% of workers surveyed could afford medical treatment

Point system discourages workers from taking sick time.

***“We do have a point system at our poultry plants
that’s designed to encourage attendance” - [Tyson](#)***

Working conditions endured at current speed

**High rates of overall injury at current speed and
under-reporting due to fear of retaliation:**

[GAO Report, 2017:](#)

2015: meat, poultry industry had 8th-highest severe injury reports.

2016: workers face hazardous conditions, incl sharp knives used in close quarters, slippery floors, and chemical exposures.

***“Workers may be reluctant to contact OSHA
for fear of employer retaliation”***

***“Workers in five selected states cited bathroom access as a concern and
said they fear speaking up at work, where OSHA inspectors typically
interview them”***

Worker injuries is critically relevant to FSIS proposal considerations

July 13, 2011 Federal Register Notice:

“FSIS also recognizes that **evaluation of the effects of line speed on food safety should include the effects of line speed on establishment employee safety.** To obtain preliminary data on this matter, FSIS has asked the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to evaluate the effects of increased line speed as part of the SIP waiver program.

High rates of Musculoskeletal disorders at current speed:

[NIOSH Musculoskeletal study, 2014](#)

41% workers had levels of hand activity and force above the ACGIH threshold limit values

42% workers had evidence of carpal tunnel syndrome

39% workers had hand or wrist symptoms

57% reported at least one musculoskeletal symptom (not incl hand or wrist symptoms)

“Line speed affects the periodicity of repetitive and forceful movements, which are key causes of musculoskeletal disorders.”

-- John Howard, Director, NIOSH in [letter to FSIS, 2014](#)

[2016 GAO report:](#) Increasing line speed and workers may increase the risk of “neighbor cuts” due to workers’ close proximity, according to NIOSH officials.

High risk of amputations

Tyson foods - amputations during the first nine months of 2015

Date	Body Part	Equip/Tool	Product	City	ST
1/2015	Index finger	Bagger	Poultry	Little Rock	AR
1/2015	Tip of finger	Impeller	Poultry	Pine Bluff	AR
2/2015	Both hands	Auger	Other	St. Josephs	MO
3/2015	Distal portion third finger	Impeller	Poultry	Monnet	MO
3/2015	Index finger	Grinder	Other	Jefferson	WI
3/2015	Tip of index finger	Conveyor	Poultry	Van Buren	AR
4/2015	Finger tip	Band saw	Beef	Lexington	NE
4/2015	Tips of middle & index fingers	Band saw	Beef	Lexington	NE
4/2015	End & outside part of thumb	Skinner	Beef	Emporia	KS
4/2015	Tip of middle finger	Not listed	Poultry	Blountsville	AL
7/2015	Middle finger to first knuckle	Cone line	Poultry	Sedalia	MO
7/2015	Ring, index & pinky fingers	Skinner	Poultry	Omaha	NE
8/2015	Not listed	Forklift	Beef	Amarillo	TX
8/2015	Not listed	Winch	Beef	Amarillo	TX
9/2015	Not listed	Gripper	Beef	Hillsdale	IL
9/2015	Thumb	Sprocket	Beef	Dakota City	NE
9/2015	Part of thumb	Wing saw	Pork	Springdale	AR

Celeste Monforton, via OSHA / Via scienceblogs.com

Voices of workers and former food inspectors

"You had less than 30 seconds to inspect the chicken. How can you look at the front, back, up and down and inside a chicken in 30 seconds? There's no way."

- Phyllis McKelvey, former USDA Food Inspector

"Night after night after night, pushing your body to the absolute maximum to get these chickens on these lines so that they could be cut."

- Poultry plant worker

**"There are so many times I went to work but I am sick.
The reason I go to work is because if I don't go I will get a point."**

- Arkansas poultry plant worker

"When I was pregnant, I had to constantly go to the bathroom, and a supervisor told me, 'Why don't women hold it like I (male supervisor) have to hold it all day?'"

- Arkansas poultry plant worker

Increasing line speed would exacerbate already dangerous conditions

- Workers in slaughter and processing jobs must work harder and faster -- resulting in even higher injury rates
- Elevated risk of further limitations on access to bathroom due to additional pressure for production
- Increased pressure combined with culture of fear is a recipe for increased injury and illness



Increasing line speed would increase health risks under COVID

- **National Academy of Sciences Study:**

Counties with poultry plants that received line speed waivers 2x rate of COVID-19 cases vs counties that did not.

Estimated COVID cases associated with livestock plants:

236,000 to 310,000 COVID-19 cases (6 to 8% of total)

Estimated COVID deaths associated with livestock plants:

4,300 to 5,200 deaths (3 to 4% of total)

- Increased pressure of a faster line greater likelihood of contact on the line -- combined with cold, humidity, infrequent breaks, lack of PPE
- Fear of retribution and point system creates greater likelihood that workers will report to work even if they are sick or have been exposed

Grave consequences for increasing line speeds

- Increased worker pain and injury
- Acute stress from increased pressure
- COVID illness and death among workers, families and entire communities.

