

Safe Food, Safe Workplaces

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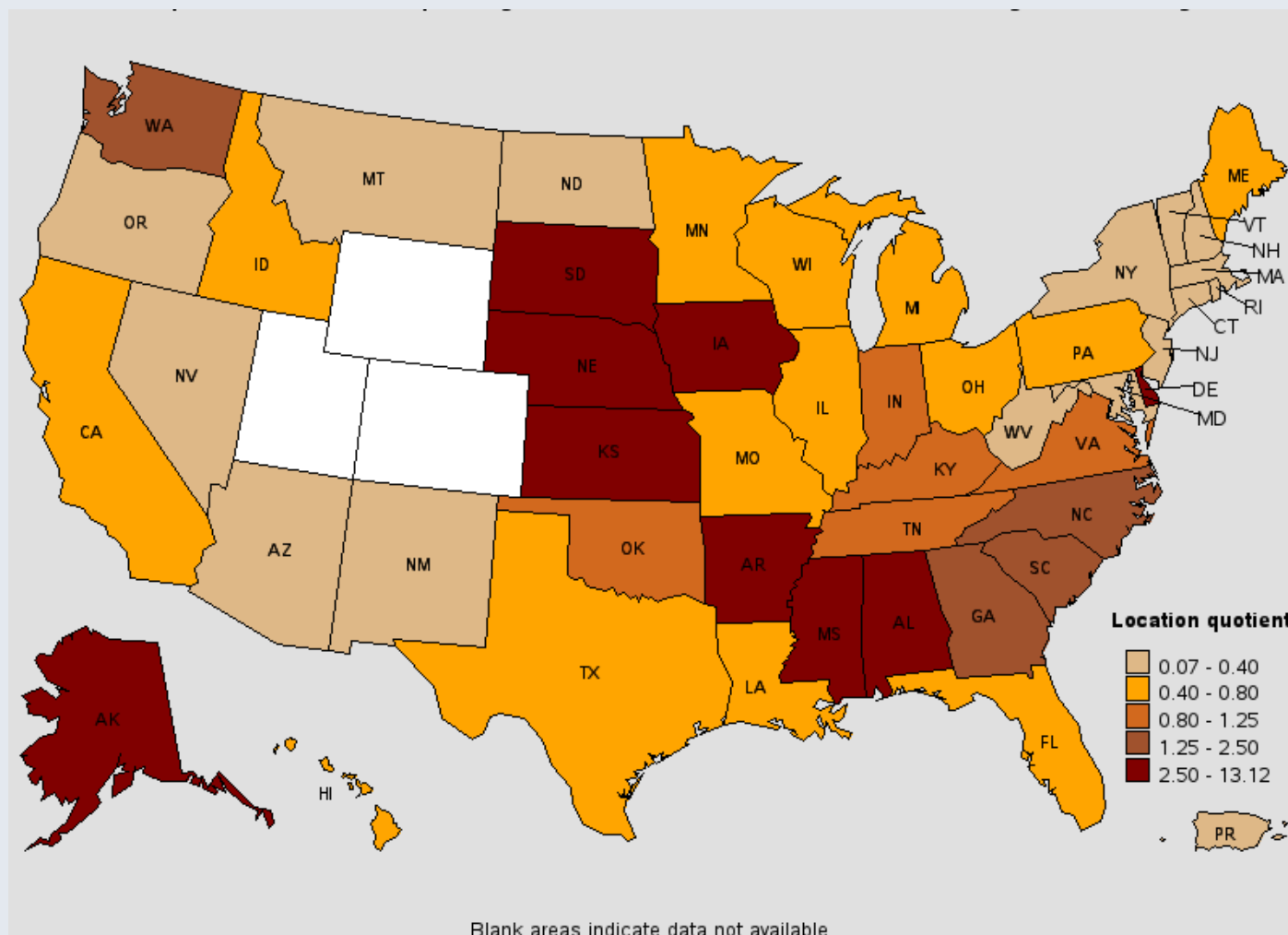
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Relative Employment Concentration of Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Employment Statistics*, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2012, <http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes513022.htm> (accessed November 2013).

USDA's Proposed Changes to Inspection System

- USDA inspects chicken and turkey carcasses in order to comply with Poultry Products Inspection Act.
- USDA has proposed increasing maximum poultry line speeds from 140 birds per minute to 175, without considering increased risks to workers.
- USDA's proposal also would transfer carcass inspection duties from federal food safety inspectors to untrained employees of poultry and turkey processing plants.



Former Turkey Processing Worker



Esmundo Juarez Carranza

Impact on Workers

- Poultry and meat workers frequently suffer work-related injury and illness.
- Employers discourage workers from seeking medical treatment and refuse to accommodate injuries or grant rest or transfers.
- Workers are often denied bathroom breaks.
- Workers face threats of deportation or firing for speaking out about workplace problems.



Photo credits: Southern Poverty Law Center, David Bundy, Edward Badham

Fast Line Speeds Pose a Threat to Worker Safety



Photo credit: Inside a Poultry Plant, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XzKP8ctxrc>



Photo credit: Charlotte Observer

Line workers suffer from serious and crippling repetitive motion injuries, like carpal tunnel syndrome, due to dangerously fast work speeds. SPLC, Nebraska Appleseed, the Coalition of Poultry Workers, and the Northwest Arkansas Workers Justice Center found that workers have to perform between 15,000 to 100,000 motions per work shift. Seventy-eight percent of workers surveyed by SPLC reported that increases in line speed made them feel less safe, made their work more painful and caused more injuries.

Studies Show That Injuries Are Common

- A 2012 study by Wake Forest found that 59.2% of poultry workers had possible or definite carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS).
- A 2013 NIOSH evaluation in one poultry plant found that 42% of workers had symptoms of CTS.
- Nebraska Appleseed reported that 62% of meat workers had been injured during the previous year in a 2009 study.
- In 2013, the Southern Poverty Law Center and Alabama Appleseed found that 77% of poultry workers in line jobs reported cumulative trauma disorders in hands and wrists.



Photo credit: Charlotte Observer

Deregulated Poultry Inspection

- HACCP-based Inspection Model Project (HIMP): pilot running in 25 plants since 1998
- Faster line speeds (up from 140 chickens/min to 175; 32 turkeys/min to 55)
- Company employees perform inspection tasks formerly conducted by USDA inspectors
- USDA proposed rule to extend to whole poultry industry



Photo Credit: (c) Earl Dotter, www.earldotter.com

Food Safety Defects

Of 229 Non-Compliance Reports filed by food safety inspectors in the pilot project plants, 208 (90%) were for **visible fecal contamination** missed by company employees.

“I observed a section of **intestine** wrapped around the rotating paddles in the neck chiller. The intestine was approximately 1 1/2 feet in length, contained **fecal material**. Additionally, numerous other pieces (of) **digestive tract materials**, such as chicken crops and esophagus were also observed in the neck chiller...This regulatory noncompliance would potentially allow for the cross contamination of necks by digestive contents material such as **ingesta** and/or **feces**.”

Food & Water Watch has made USDA records from this pilot project available on its website: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/foodsafety/privatized-poultry-inspection-usdas-pilot-project-results/>

“Other Consumer Protections”



Example of "**digestive content**" defect in a product from a plant in the pilot program (the yellow substance on the chicken).

Photo credit: David Barrett.

Highest error rate: dressing defects (feathers, lungs, trachea and bile on carcass.)

Average error rate: 64 percent (chicken); 87 percent (turkey). One turkey facility had nearly 100 percent defect rate.

The new rule will pull federal inspectors off the line...



Photo Credit: (c) Earl Dotter, www.earldotter.com



Photo Credit: Alice Welch, USDA /Flickr



Photo Credit: www.worldpoultry.net



Photo Credit: USDA-ARS photo by Keith Weller

...and allow for increased line speeds at the risk of food and worker safety.



Photo Credit: Earl Dotter



Photo Credit: Earl Dotter

The Government Accountability Office found that USDA's proposal has not yet accounted for important shortcomings.



Photo credit: Earl Dotter

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has not thoroughly evaluated the performance of each of the pilot projects over time even though the agency stated it would do so when it announced the pilot projects. . . . USDA did not disclose certain limitations in sources of information it relied on to develop the cost-benefit analysis supporting the proposed rule on modernizing poultry slaughter inspections.”

The GAO's report (GAO-13-775) is available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/657144.pdf>

Poultry workers and consumers call for slower work speeds in order to have humane working conditions and safe food.



Thank you for listening!



Photo credit: Charlotte Observer

With any follow-up questions, please contact:

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