

Poultry Inspectors: New System Risks Worker, Food Safety

American Federation of Government Employees

WASHINGTON (PRNewswire-USNewswire) — The American Federation of Government Employees is calling on House lawmakers to prevent the U.S. Department of Agriculture from implementing a new poultry inspection system that would jeopardize worker and food safety and put the American public at risk.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut has introduced an amendment to the fiscal 2015 Agriculture Appropriations Bill that would prevent the USDA from spending any money to finalize and implement its proposed poultry inspection rule. AFGE strongly supports the amendment and encourages all lawmakers to vote for it when it comes to the floor on Wednesday.

"The current poultry inspection system certainly has its flaws. But the USDA's cost-cutting plan would transform an imperfect system into a potentially lethal one," AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. said.

The USDA proposed rule, which was first proposed in January 2012 and has been stalled ever since, would remove most federal inspectors from the slaughter line and turn over inspection activities currently performed by federal inspectors to untrained employees hired by the poultry processing plants. The proposal also would allow plants to increase their line speeds up to 175 chicken carcasses per minute, meaning that the lone remaining federal inspector on the slaughter line will have one-third of one second to examine each chicken carcass for disease, infection and contamination.

"The USDA officials who came up with this plan need to go to Las Vegas. If they can keep a straight face while claiming that their plan will make our food safer, they could clean up at the poker tables," Cox said. "There is no question that the American public will be at greater risk for foodborne illnesses and outbreaks if this proposed rule is finalized and becomes law."

The chief goal of this proposal is to save money, not to increase safety for consumers or workers, Cox said. The plan would save USDA about \$90 million over three years, while poultry plants would reap more than \$250 million a year in profits from increasing line speeds, according to the agency's own documents.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union, representing 670,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia.

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