

VIA EMAIL

December 12, 2017

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Secretary Sonny Perdue  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On behalf of the 1.3 million member United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union family, more than 70,000 of whom hold jobs inside poultry plants, we write with great concern over the poultry industry petitioning the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to eliminate line speed limits.

If this petition is accepted, poultry companies will be allowed to run their food processing lines as fast as they please. Allowing this to occur will put hard-working poultry workers at greater risk of being injured and consumers at greater risk of becoming ill from eating improperly inspected chicken.

These concerns are fully supported by last week's report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which showed that workers in the poultry industry are regularly being exposed to amputation hazards, toxic chemicals, and fast-paced repetitive tasks associated with musculoskeletal disorders at current line speed limits.

Most glaring of all, the GAO report also confirmed that poultry workers throughout the industry, in the interest of keeping the line moving at all costs, are being regularly denied bathroom breaks. This finding supports a 2016 report by Oxfam America, which heartbreakingly highlighted that poultry workers inside nonunion plants were being forced to wear diapers because of their inability to leave the line.

While we are proud that UFCW members who work inside poultry plants are not subjected to these dehumanizing conditions because they have a voice in the workplace, most of the hard-working men and women who hold jobs in this industry are not so fortunate. Deciding to increase line speeds while so many poultry workers are enduring dehumanizing and dangerous conditions simply makes no sense. The fact that

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such unacceptable conditions are happening regularly in nonunion plants at current line speeds only proves that allowing processing lines to move even faster will make workers and the chicken Americans consume much less safe.

As the public comment period ends on the poultry industry petition to eliminate line speeds, we urge you to take our concerns and the findings of the GAO report seriously. Now is the time for the USDA to take more decisive steps to protect vulnerable workers inside poultry plants, particularly at nonunion plants where they routinely struggle to speak up about inhumane conditions—not to end line speed limits.

For the sake of protecting hard-working poultry workers and American families who consume chicken, rejecting this line speed petition is the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

/s/ Anthony M. Perrone

International President

cc: Honorable K. Michael Conaway  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture

Honorable Collin C. Peterson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture

Honorable Pat Roberts  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Carmen M. Rottenberg  
Acting Deputy Under Secretary  
Office of Food Safety, USDA

R. Alexander Acosta  
U.S. Secretary of Labor