

## **The Proposed Poultry Slaughter “Modernization” Rule: FAQs**

**Q: What is the Proposed Rule?**

A: On January 27, 2012, the Federal Register published a proposed rule, “Modernization of Poultry Slaughter Inspection.” This rule discards the current method of inspecting the majority of poultry that is eaten in the U.S. and instead implements a New Poultry Slaughter Inspection System in all poultry plants that utilize automated slaughter methods. Central to the new inspection system is the reduction of USDA/FSIS inspectors and the increase in the speed that the birds are processed, from the current 70 to 91 birds per minute up to a maximum of 175 birds per minute.

**Q: Why does UFCW oppose this proposed rule?**

A: The UFCW opposes this new rule because no effort has been made to determine the effect this new inspection system will have on the health and safety of the workers in these plants. FSIS and USDA have remained steadfast in their assertion that worker safety is not within their regulatory jurisdiction, and instead this responsibility falls to OSHA.

**Q: What are UFCW’s health and safety concerns?**

A: By increasing the line speed maximum by 100 birds per minute, workers will be at heightened risk of repetitive motion related injuries and MSDs, without any enforceable safety standard to rely on. Comprehensive studies addressing the impact changes in slaughter and processing methods have upon workers need to be conducted. The increased risk of MSDs like carpal tunnel syndrome, lacerations, slips and falls, and exposure to chemicals all need to be assessed.

**Q: USDA says this program is voluntary, is it?**

A: The majority of poultry workers are in largely automated plants. These plants will be given the “choice” of utilizing the inspection system and running their lines up to 175 birds per minute, or utilizing the “traditional” method of inspection which limits line speed to less than half of this. It would be an impractical expectation to think that the large plants would choose not to speed up their lines.

**Q: What does UFCW want USDA to do?**

A: UFCW wants USDA to pull the rule entirely until NIOSH and OSHA can conduct comprehensive studies on the impact it would have on workers in poultry plants. NIOSH claims that these studies take one year to complete.

**Q: Who is affected?**

A: There are over 200,000 workers in the poultry industry, including a large proportion of women and minorities.

**Q: What can I do?**

A: Submit comments to the USDA voicing your opposition to this proposed rule by April 26, 2012.