How Fast Is Too Fast? OSHA’s Regulation of the Meat Industry’s Line Speed and the Price Paid by Humans and Animals

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The growth of the meat industry has placed pressure making the speed of production. However, inspectors, often employed requiring OSHA argues that it does not have authority over the pace of the line speeds. The salary of employees and are less likely to report a workplace hazard out of fear of losing their jobs. A number of laborers in the meatpacking industry are undocumented or do not speak English, making them more vulnerable and fearful of reporting workplace hazards. Despite the growth of meat production, slaughterhouse workers' wages have been rapidly declining. The salary of meatpacking employees barely keeps workers above the poverty line, thus affecting their access to health services as they cannot afford proper transportation to and from doctors, much less healthcare. Furthermore, many slaughterhouses operate twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, requiring employees to work grueling hours—often without approved time off. Additionally, laborers are not allowed unionize, thus facing barriers to exercise their freedom of association.

Consumption of animal products results in the unnecessary suffering and death of billions of animals. Despite having some regulation, like the Humane Slaughter Act, animals are still subjected to inhumane acts of cruelty during processing. While some states have anti-cruelty statutes that work to prevent this conduct, they focus on the individual violations rather than the overall industry violations. The Washington Post reports that “nearly 1 million chickens and turkeys are unintentionally boiled alive each year in U.S. slaughterhouses” due to the increasing pace of product lines. Currently, line speed is regulated by the USDA based on Food Safety standards and it is only limited by federal sanitation laws. That is, the only time the speed of the line is slowed down is when a USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspector halts the line because she or he identifies an animal carcass that appears contaminated (e.g., fecally, bruised, and hemorrhaged). Otherwise, line speed can increase without any concern for a worker’s safety. Under the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA) and the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), the regulation of line speed by the USDA for sanitation concerns does not preclude OSHA from regulating line speed for worker health and safety concerns. Though previous attempts by OSHA to regulate line speeds have been blocked by Congress, OSHA must regulate line speed to not only ensure a safe and healthy working condition for workers but to also curb animal cruelty in the meatpacking industry.

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ENDNOTES: HOW FAST IS TOO FAST? OSHA’S REGULATION OF THE MEAT INDUSTRY’S LINE SPEED AND THE PRICE PAID BY HUMANS AND ANIMALS

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5. See id. at 393.


8. See Dillard, supra note 4, at 393.


10. Id.


14. See id.

15. Slaughterhouse Workers, supra note 7.


19. See id.


21. See id.


23. See Dillard, supra note 4, at 395.

24. See id.


26. Workplace Safety & Health, supra note 9, at 32.

27. Slaughterhouse Workers, supra note 7.

28. See id.

29. See id.

30. Workplace Safety & Health, supra note 9, at 32.