

Big Chicken Wants Trump to Gut Bird Law

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In the midst of rising US demand for poultry, the chicken industry is lobbying hard for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to permit chicken processing plants to abandon current inspection line restrictions that only allow plants to process 140 birds per minute-or about two birds a second-according to a report from NBC News.

The lobbying group created a petition last month calling the 140 limit "arbitrary" (which sounds strangely familiar), and requesting that plants be able to "operate at any line speed at which they can maintain process control." The petition suggests that deregulating line speed would help Trump in his quest to reduce "regulatory burdens on the industry" and "make the federal government more efficient."

Big Chicken previously pressed the Obama administration to speed up inspection lines, but the USDA policy remained, thanks to efforts from workers' rights and food safety advocates who raised concerns that the changes would harm workers and lead to more cases of contamination.

But Representative Doug Collins, who represents a Georgia district with many chicken processing plants, is siding with the National Chicken Council, chasing the notion that slaughterhouses and processing plants need such regulation.

"The conditions are safer now because we have laws that were written because of the Upton Sinclair era," Patty Lovera, assistant director of Food & Water Watch told Gizmodo. "We have laws that say that the government will be in plants and they'll look at every bird and they'll look at every carcass. The industry loves taking shots at those rules. And that's what this is. You're taking animals apart and that's messy and you have to do that carefully."

National Chicken Council spokesperson Tom Super told Gizmodo that the plants that would have quicker line speeds would have higher food safety scrutiny and government oversight than plants with slower speeds. "Weâ??ve had 20 plants operating at higher line speeds for almost 20 years as part of a USDA pilot project to modernize poultry inspection" Super said. "Over that time, the data consistently show that those plants perform on par or better in terms of worker safety and food safety."