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As Coronavirus Outbreak Increases Demands on Meatpacking Workers, Court Advances Lawsuit to Stop Dangerous USDA Rule that Threatens Food Safety

America's Largest Meatpacking Union and Public Citizen Continue Effort to Halt USDA's Dangerous New Pork Plant Line Speed Rule

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, [United Food and Commercial Workers \(UFCW\) International Union](#) and [Public Citizen](#) announced that their federal lawsuit to stop the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) new swine slaughter modernization rule has been cleared to move forward following [a ruling](#) by the United States District Court for the District of Minnesota.

The lawsuit filed by UFCW International and **UFCW Locals 663, 440 and 2**, seeks to halt a USDA rule which eliminates the line speed limits in pork slaughter plants and turns inspection of our food over to the companies that produce it.

"America's pork workers won an important victory with this ruling as our lawsuit moves forward to stop the USDA's dangerous line speed rule. As we confront the coronavirus outbreak, these workers are more important than ever to protecting our food supply chain," **said UFCW International President Marc Perrone**. "Stopping the USDA's reckless pork lobby giveaway is essential to the safety of our country's food and the hardworking men and women who produce it. We are proud to continue this fight to ensure food safety never takes a backseat to corporate profits."

The nation's union for meatpacking and food processing workers is challenging the rule as unsafe for workers. The court largely denied USDA's efforts to dismiss claims brought by the unions.

The ruling, by [Judge Joan Erickson](#) of the United States District Court for the District of Minnesota, held that the unions adequately alleged that the USDA's explanations for disregarding the impact on worker safety when issuing its rule were not rational. [Read more about the case](#).

"Our members have always known this rule made no sense and would threaten the safety of the plants where they work and the food they produce," **said UFCW Local Presidents Martin Rosas (Local 2), Leo Kanne (Local 440) and Matt Utecht (Local 663)**. "The USDA must listen to the American workers across the country who know that food safety and worker safety must always be the USDA's top priority."

Background:

In 2019, the USDA published a new rule for pork meat inspections which removes limits on line speeds in swine slaughter plants and turns over major meat inspection tasks from federal inspectors to meat companies.

- The UFCW represents about 250,000 workers in the meatpacking and food processing industries and 30,000 workers in pork plants. UFCW members handle 71 percent of all hogs slaughtered and processed in the United States.
- In [May 2018](#), more than 6,500 UFCW members who work in pork plants submitted comments to the USDA in opposition to [the proposed rule](#) that would increase the line speeds where they work, threatening both them and the consumers they serve.
- All the UFCW locals who are parties in the lawsuit represent pork slaughter workers. UFCW Local 663 is based in Brooklyn Center, Minn.; UFCW Local 440 is based in Denison, Iowa; and UFCW Local 2 is based in Bel Aire, Kan.

The Modernization of Swine Slaughter Inspection rule will hurt workers across the country.

Hazards of Modernization of Swine Slaughter Inspection Rule:

- The Modernization of Swine Slaughter Inspection rule removes all limitations on line speeds in hog slaughter plants which will endanger the health and safety of tens of thousands of workers in the hog slaughter industry.
- Even at current line speeds, swine slaughter and processing workers face many job risks that can lead to severe injury, illness and death.
- There is no evidence that line speed increases can be done in a manner that ensures food and worker safety.
- In 1997, the USDA created a pilot program called the HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project (HIMP) which allowed five hog slaughter plants to test a new food safety program. The hog slaughter pilot program revealed serious safety issues including a Clemens food plant in Pennsylvania which reported injuries severe enough that two workers were hospitalized, and one suffered an amputation.
- The Modernization of Swine Slaughter Inspection rule includes no requirement or funding to train plant employees on inspection techniques that were previously performed by USDA inspectors and are now their responsibility.
- Increased line speeds will disproportionately hurt women and people of color.

Key Facts About Pork Workers:

- Meatpacking workers in hog slaughter plants work in cold, wet, noisy, and slippery conditions making tens of thousands of forceful repetitive motions on each shift.
- Research shows that the fast pace in pork plants, coupled with the forceful and repetitive nature of most of the jobs, leads to high rates of injuries and health issues.
- Meatpacking workers are injured at 2.4 times the rate of other industries. These injuries result in lost time or restrictions at three times the rate of other industries and they face illness rates at 17 times the rate of other industries.
- The previous maximum line speed for swine was 1,106 hogs per hour.

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