



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAR 07 2019

Ms. Wenonah Hauter
Executive Director
Food & Water Watch
1616 P Street NW, Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Ms. Hauter:

Thank you for your letter of February 7, 2019, congratulating me on my appointment as Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). I am honored and excited by the appointment, look forward to working with you as well, and appreciate the opportunity to respond.

I appreciate your questions about line speed waivers for specific establishments. In the September 28, 2018 *Federal Register* (83 FR 49048), FSIS provided information on the criteria young chicken slaughter establishments need to meet to operate under a line speed waiver. FSIS previously outlined these criteria in the *February 23, 2018, FSIS Constituent Update*. To be eligible for line speed waivers, young chicken slaughter establishments need to meet these criteria. For example, to meet these criteria, these establishments must have been operating under the New Poultry Inspection System (NPIS) for at least a year; must be in *Salmonella* performance standard category 1 or 2 for young chicken carcasses, which means they are meeting the performance standard; must have a demonstrated history of regulatory compliance; and must be able to show that the new equipment, technologies, or procedures to operate at a faster line speed will maintain or improve food safety (83 FR 49050). FSIS also explained that the 20 young chicken establishments already operating under line speed waivers must meet these new criteria to remain eligible for the waiver, and that the Agency may revoke a line speed waiver if an establishment does not meet these criteria.

On February 8, 2019, FSIS formally notified Mr. Allen Boudet that the Agency intended to revoke the line speed waiver issued to Norman W. Fries, Inc. (doing business as Claxton Poultry Farms, P-6505), that allows operation of young chicken slaughter lines at speeds up to 175 bpm. The establishment responded with a request for a seven week period in which to reduce its line speeds, so that it can adjust its live-side operations to minimize potential animal welfare issues associated with birds currently being raised in hatcheries. On February 27, 2019, FSIS notified Claxton Poultry Farms that the establishment waiver will be revoked, effective April 8, 2019.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

Mindy Brashears, Ph.D.
Deputy Under Secretary
Office of Food Safety