

## Poultry Processors May Qualify for Line Speed Waivers

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Thanks to a new waiver opportunity, chicken processing plants may soon be able to increase their federally mandated production limitations.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture [issued new criteria](#) in September that would allow young chicken slaughter facilities to apply for a waiver to bypass the federal inspection line speed limit of 140 birds per minute (bpm) and increase production to 175 bpm.

A prior pilot program allowed 20 establishments to obtain a waiver allowing the production of 175 bpm. On Sept. 28, the FSIS handed down its new criteria that would allow for waiver requests for other young chicken slaughter establishments throughout the country.

But there are specific conditions an establishment must demonstrate to get a waiver. The criteria include:

- Participation in the New Poultry Inspection System (NPIS) for at least a year with full compliance
- Participation in the FSIS's Salmonella Initiative Program (SIP) in performance standard category 1 or 2
- Demonstrated history of regulatory compliance with at least a 120-day period without an enforcement action

Additional criteria also require the submission of substantial information regarding the establishment's Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system, effective process controls, the effectiveness of equipment or technologies at faster line speed and employee safety issues.

The new criteria will require establishments with line speed waivers to conduct daily aerobic plate count testing for indicator organisms and to make the results available to FSIS. The former requirement was weekly testing. Compliance with good commercial practices (GCPs) is an essential component of obtaining and maintaining a waiver.

Interestingly, the FSIS has stated that it will limit additional line speed waivers to establishments that have the ability and intend to operate at line speeds higher than 140 bpm. Young chicken establishments granted a line speed waiver will routinely need to operate at least one line at speeds above 140 bpm on average but not higher than 175 bpm. Establishments with multiple lines may operate more than one line above 140 bpm and up to 175 bpm, but if they do, they will need to collect separate data for each individual line. In the event that establishments are consistently unable to maintain process control at line speeds higher than 140 bpm or consistently are operating at line speeds lower than 140 bpm, the waiver could be taken away. The "use it or lose it" nature of the rule means that waiver applicants must make the capital investments and other improvements necessary to operate at the higher speeds and compliantly operate at those speeds on an ongoing basis, or they will lose the waiver.

The previous 20 facilities granted waivers will have a time period to comply with the new requirements.

If you have questions about the new waiver requirements, please any member of the [Barley Snyder Food &](#)

Agribusiness Industry Group.

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