

Hello, welcome to another episode of More than Meat. Today, we are going to explore the history of federal food safety laws and identify human health as a driving point for livestock-related legislation. Many of the federal laws pertaining animal agriculture are related to food safety. This is understandably the case, as most people are concerned about the health implications of what they are eating, especially considering of the risk of food poisoning. Meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products are breeding grounds for bacteria like E. Coli, Salmonella, listeria, campylobacter, and parasites. Intensified animal agriculture and the emergence of confined animal feeding operations contribute to the conditions that foster the growth of these bacteria and parasites. In confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, animals are trapped in unsanitary conditions with their feces and urine, and the crowded conditions are a breeding ground for bacteria. Diseases spread quickly from animal to animal, and antimicrobial resistance has emerged as a result of antibiotic overuse. Regulating and monitoring animal agriculture and its related products is an important job because it concerns the safety of those who consume animal products, as well as those who work in the industry. The USDA is the agency responsible for regulating, inspecting, and monitoring all meat, poultry, and egg products sold in interstate and foreign commerce (NCSL). Within the USDA, the Food Safety and Inspection Service is responsible for ensuring compliance with food safety requirements and inspection legislation. These entities are responsible for guaranteeing the monitoring and implementation of food safety legislation related to animal agriculture, and protecting those who consume animal products from disease, parasites, and food poisoning. While these laws are put in place to promote food safety, they have consequences for slaughterhouse workers and animal welfare. In the next few minutes, we are going to examine the history of food safety legislation for animal products, and delve into implications for workers and animal welfare.

Food safety legislation for animal products dates back to the 1800s, when the first pieces of legislation were drafted to require inspection of meat products. In 1884, President Arthur signed an act creating the USDA Bureau of Animal Industry, responsible for preventing diseased animals from being sold as food. In 1890, President Benjamin Harrison signed the first law requiring meat inspection, targeting salted pork and bacon intended for exportation. A year later in 1891, the law was amended to include live beef and cattle intended for export (FSIS 2012).

In 1905, Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle*, a scathing criticism of the harsh, dirty conditions in the meatpacking industry. The Jungle was significant because it galvanized the creation of federal food safety laws. The book detailed the diseased, rotten, and contaminated meat found in slaughterhouses that made its way to the plates of American consumers. In the early 1900s, the meat-packing industry was heavily consolidated, and four major companies had bought out most of the smaller competitors in the industry. As a result, Armour, Swift, Morris, and National Packing had the power to dictate prices to all players of the supply chain. These companies were known as the “Big Four” and had their operations centralized in a few big cities, namely Chicago. Sinclair’s book delved into the nitty-gritty details of Packingtown, a housing area near the slaughterhouses where the workers lived. Sinclair detailed the pre-Ford “disassembly” lines, where meat packers were required to do 80 separate jobs from killing and gutting an animal to cutting its meat to sell. Immigrant men were subjected to the most dangerous work, and were expected to stand all day on floors covered in blood and animal scraps, wielding sharp knives and other tools. Women and children were also subjected to undesirable work, expected to participate in meat trimming and canning. Despite these conditions, workers made just pennies an hour. A majority of the packing-house workers were immigrants from Poland, Slovakia, and Lithuania. Sinclair’s The Jungle was a fictionalized story, reflecting his perceptions on the

terrible conditions workers were subjected to, and the unsanitary conditions America's meat is slaughtered and processed in.

In response, President Theodore Roosevelt passed the Federal Meat Inspection Act in 1906. The Federal Meat Inspection Act established four major sanitary requirements for the meat packing industry. The Act required mandatory inspection of livestock before slaughter and after slaughter, established sanitary standards for slaughterhouses, and allowed the USDA to issue grants of inspection and monitor slaughter and processing operations (FSIS 2014). The Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906 aimed to improve human health by improving the sanitary conditions of slaughterhouses. The Bureau of Animal Industry established in 1884 was responsible for ensuring food safety standards established by the Federal Meat Inspection Act were being met.

After World War II, the meat processing industry expanded significantly due to advancements in infrastructure and refrigeration. The growth of the federal highway system and the use of refrigerated trucks allowed meatpacking centers to move from densely populated urban areas to rural areas. In 1946, the Agricultural Marketing Act was passed, which granted the USDA the authority to inspect and certify the quality and condition of agricultural products. The USDA began to offer voluntary expectation and grading services to meat processors. In 1957, Congress passed the Poultry Products Inspection Act, that stipulated that poultry products moved in interstate commerce must be continuously inspected prior to and after slaughter, and before processing. The Poultry Products Inspection Act built upon the Federal Meat Inspection Act, which did not include poultry at the time of passage. The law also required the inspection of

slaughtering and processing facilities, and that labeling must be accurate and truthful (FSIS 2014).

In the 1960s, the Wholesome Meat Act and Wholesome Poultry Act were passed to amend the Federal Meat Inspection Act and Poultry Products Inspection Act. These acts established a minimum sanitation requirement to be met by State inspection entities, and require state inspection programs to be “at least equal” to the Federal counterpart (NCSL). The USDA Food and Safety Inspection Service is responsible for annually certifying that each state inspection service is meeting federal inspection requirements. The acts aimed to establish a federal standard for sanitation to improve food safety nationally. In 1970, Congress passed the Egg Products Inspection Act, which required the mandatory continuous inspection of the processing of liquid, frozen, and dried egg products. The act also included the inspection of egg hatcheries and packers; however, their inspection is not continuous. In 1995, the Food Safety and Inspection Services became the entity responsible for egg inspection.

Following the passage of the Egg Products Inspection Act, there have been several unsuccessful attempts to pass amendments that consider animal welfare.

In 2012, the Humane Society and the United Egg Producers partnered to support the Egg Products Inspection Act Amendment of 2012, a bipartisan bill introduced by Representatives from Oregon and California. The Humane Society framed the potential bill as “an opportunity to improve conditions for egg-laying hens and provide stability for egg farmers” (The Humane Society 2012). The proposed bill would have required egg producers to double the space per hen, and implement other animal welfare improvements. The bill considered barriers for

farmers, and offered a tiered phase-in period that would give farmers flexibility to improve housing conditions. The amendment arose from disparity between standards applied to eggs in interstate commerce. Egg farmers desired a federal standard to enhance hen welfare and offer more stability for the egg farmers represented by the United Egg Producers, that produce 88% of the nation's eggs. The Humane Society and United Egg Producers strived to balance economic feasibility with animal welfare, and even included some components of food safety. The proposed Act would prohibit excessive ammonia levels in henhouses and improve the cramped conditions that contribute to the rapid spread of disease and require ample antibiotic use. The amendment didn't pass; however, it represented a movement towards consolidating animal welfare with food safety.

In 2015, the Committee on Animal Law of the New York City Bar Association submitted a comment recommending an amendment to the Federal Meat Inspection Act to allow the state regulation of the treatment of livestock at slaughterhouses, as long as state regulation met federal laws and regulations. The Committee on Animal Law of the New York City Bar Association used public health and animal welfare as their two main arguments to support the amendment to the bill. In their memorandum, the committee argues that downed animals are more likely to carry disease, including mad cow disease, Salmonella, and E. Coli because they stand in feces and have weakened immune systems (NYC Bar 2015).

Today, the Federal Meat, Poultry, and Egg Products Acts dominate as the existing legislation related to food safety and animal agriculture. These acts are concerned with the inspection of animal products to promote improvements in human health. While human health may be at the forefront, federal food safety laws have trickle down effects that impact animal ag-workers' rights

and animal welfare as well. Upon examination of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle, inspiration for the Federal Meat Inspection Act in 1906, it is apparent that the slaughterhouse workers were subjected to inhuman conditions as they were forced to kill and disassemble animals. When Sinclair exposed the harsh realities of the meatpacking industry, the public responded viscerally and demanded the creation of legislation to regulate the industry. Unfortunately, this legislation did not improve the labor conditions for the unskilled immigrants. Today, unskilled immigrants are still exposed to poor conditions in slaughterhouses, despite the introduction of the Federal Meat Inspection Act. On a similar note, while food safety legislation can be used as an arguing point to create animal improve animal welfare, previous attempts have been unsuccessful. The Egg Products Inspection Act Amendment of 2012 and recommended amendment to the Federal Meat Inspection Act in 2015 are two examples of amendments utilizing food safety as a lobbying point to promote animal welfare. While these amendments were unsuccessful, they illustrate how food safety and human health can be used as an arguing point to promote animal welfare.

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