

STATUS OF POULTRY SANITATION¹

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Three general statements describe the status of poultry sanitation today: (a) Substantial gains have been made in poultry sanitation by many progressive processors and distributors; (b) there is a definite need for even wider application of known sanitary measures throughout much of the poultry industry; and (c) there are a number of current developments which show promise of bringing about vast improvements within the next few years.

SUBSTANTIAL GAINS

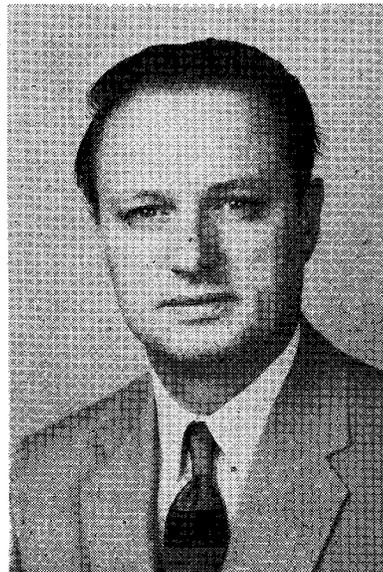
Evidence of improved sanitary practice in the poultry-processing industry is apparent to all. The variety of appetizing ready-to-cook and precooked poultry products available in stores throughout the United States afford a sharp contrast to the live or New York-dressed bird commonly offered to the housewife in the past. Improved sanitary practice has made the processing and distribution of these products possible.

Much credit is due the poultry-processing industry for these advancements. Undoubtedly, self-interest has been one prime motive of those responsible. The availability of ready-to-cook and precooked poultry and poultry products has been the basis for a 100 percent increase in poultry production since 1940. Nevertheless, the best interests of the consuming public have also been served to the extent that progress has been made by the industry in utilizing better sanitation and refrigeration practices.

In 1928, certain members of the poultry industry requested the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide a poultry inspection and sanitation service to help assure the wholesomeness and sanitary quality of processed poultry. Such a service has been provided, on a permissive basis, since that time. More than 250 plants now operate under U.S.D.A. inspection, producing between 20 and 25 percent of the total poultry processed in the United States. The operators of these establishments are to be commended, particularly because they are not required to have the inspection service, but voluntarily apply for it and pay most of the cost involved.

Important in influencing processors to use the U.S.D.A. inspection and sanitation services are the

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requirements of the Department of Defense for inspected poultry to feed military personnel. Contributory, also, is the assistance thus provided the processor in meeting the requirements of regulatory agencies, such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or State and local regulatory agencies.

Along similar lines, some State and local jurisdictions offer permissive poultry inspection and sanitation services. Furthermore, general food sanitation programs in many States and municipalities have been effective in bringing about varied improvements in poultry sanitation within the jurisdictions concerned. In a few instances, specific poultry regulations within

a metropolitan consuming area have resulted in improved sanitary practice in processing plants supplying the market, even though located in distant jurisdictions (e.g., the poultry-sanitation requirements of Cincinnati, Ohio, and the requirement for official inspection of ready-to-cook poultry shipped into New York City).

STATUS GENERALLY UNSATISFACTORY

Notwithstanding progress made, many existing conditions and practices leave much to be desired. State and local poultry-sanitation requirements vary greatly. Some poultry processors have never been advised on the essentials of good sanitary practice, or have disregarded such advice in this absence of effective, official enforcement. Full realization of the need for uniform, adequate, official enforcement programs is just becoming apparent on the part of many regulatory officials, legislators, consumers, and representatives of the poultry industry.

Furthermore, enforcement of applicable regulations may be largely ineffective because of (a) inexperience or disinterest on the part of enforcement personnel, (b) insufficient number of personnel for enforcement, (c) lack of public, official, or industry support for the program, or (d) because the regulations do not provide the authority needed for effective enforcement.

Unsatisfactory Conditions

Some of the conditions and operations found, which are unsatisfactory from a sanitation viewpoint, are:

1. Lack of adequate separation of live poultry areas, poultry dressing operations, and eviscerating and subsequent processing operations. This is frequently associated with inadequate space for operations conducted, and lack of proper construction and maintenance of floors, walls, doors, windows, and processing equipment.

2. Lack of proper ventilation, with employees and products exposed to heavily contaminated air.

3. Lack of adequate bleeding of poultry.

4. Lack of proper bleeding and scalding facilities in small establishments.

5. Lack of proper eviscerating facilities in small establishments.

6. Lack of adequate lavatories and of facilities along the processing line for rinsing hands and utensils.

7. Lack of adequate facilities for thorough cleaning and sanitizing of small utensils and portable equipment.

8. Inadequate methods for cleaning and sanitizing equipment and plant; cleaning not performed at proper intervals.

9. Processing operations conducted at speeds which are incompatible with proper maintenance of sanitary

conditions, and which render it impossible or impracticable for employees to perform their duties consistently in a sanitary manner.

10. Inadequate cleaning and washing of dressed poultry.

11. Chilling in ice slush, or other holding of New York-dressed carcasses before evisceration.

12. Contamination of giblets and edible carcass during evisceration with material from crops or intestines.

13. Inadequate pinning, trimming, evisceration, or washing of so-called ready-to-cook poultry; improper procedures or sequence for the various steps of evisceration.

14. Inadequate facilities, methods, or temperatures for the chilling and other refrigeration of products.

15. Lack of proper sanitary precautions in the processing of precooked poultry products.

16. Water supplies insufficient, not of known safety, lacking in adequate pressure; cross-connections and submerged inlets.

17. Inadequate protection against rodents and insects.

18. Waste-disposal facilities, methods, or schedules not adequate for consistent protection of product from contamination and for general maintenance of sanitary conditions.

19. Poor personal hygiene and habits of employees.

20. General sanitation of plant and premises unsatisfactory.

21. Products not adequately protected or refrigerated subsequent to shipment from the processing establishment.

In many instances, habit, local custom, or economic considerations may be responsible for the existence of these unsatisfactory conditions. Contributing in large measure, however, is a lack of knowledge or interest on the part of management in regard to the need for, and value of, proper sanitation. This results either in a similar lack of knowledge or interest on the part of employees, or in a feeling of frustration and helplessness among those employees who are informed and conscientious in this regard. In addition, representatives of official agencies may fail to carry out their responsibilities, thus confounding management and employees alike.

A Few Examples

Following are just a few examples which show that the inadequacies existing today in some poultry-processing plants are not confined to very small plants, or to those not under official surveillance. All of these examples were observed in relatively large establishments producing substantial to extremely large volumes of poultry. In some instances, all or part of the resulting product carried an official legend or stamp indicating official inspection for wholesomeness or pro-

duction under official sanitary supervision.

1. On a visit with a local regulatory official to a large, well-constructed and well-equipped plant, it was observed that the vents of the carcasses were being pulled outward and excised, thus opening the cloaca or terminal part of the intestines and contaminating the body cavities of the carcasses with fecal matter. The "inside-bird-washer" was not being used to wash out the eviscerated carcasses because "so many girls were sick and didn't come to work that day". It was quite apparent that there was no shortage of personnel to hang birds on the line for slaughter and to remove the eviscerated carcasses from the line for chilling and shipment from the plant. No enforcement action was initiated, presumably because of the absence of an adequate municipal ordinance dealing specifically with poultry.

2. On an informational survey with State and local officials, a number of poultry-processing plants were visited. Several of these were operating under continuous inspection-for-wholesomeness services. Significant sanitation deficiencies were noted in each plant, e.g., (a) air in processing rooms heavily laden with dust from live-poultry areas; (b) surfaces of "flaps" in conveyor-line openings having thick accumulations of organic matter caused by repeated contact over many months with carcasses on the processing line, accompanied, apparently, by an absolute lack of thorough cleaning at any time; (c) head-pulling contrivances which removed the heads of carcasses but left the stick-wounds and adjacent contaminated tissues on the carcasses, and which, in some instances, appeared as if they had never been effectively cleaned of the coagulated blood and other soil; (d) frequent and unnecessary contamination of edible tissues during evisceration, with one official inspector actually pulling the suspended viscera loose from each carcass, breaking intestines and contaminating his hands, the giblets, and the carcasses with fecal matter; and (e) a general lack of adequate number of lavatories, and of utensil and equipment-cleaning facilities.

3. In an exceptionally large, new plant, one processing line was operating under continuous official inspection, with relatively sanitary eviscerating procedures. Another line operating without official inspection was running at a speed approximately four times that of the inspected line, with vents being pulled out and excised, and numerous other procedures and conditions resulting in repeated contamination of product. A very large fan blowing inward at the live-poultry receiving door forced a draft of dust-laden air down a hall at the far end of the holding room, into the eviscerating room. After a day in the plant, clothing and nose were impregnated with dust. Of course,

the eviscerated product was likewise exposed.

4. On an informational survey with State personnel, several plants were visited, and varying undesirable conditions observed. One large eviscerating plant, operating under an official inspection-for-wholesomeness program, conducted no slaughtering and dressing operations, but processed New York-dressed poultry supposed to originate in plants operating under continuous official sanitation supervision. Some carcasses had been opened, found partly frozen, and placed back in tanks of water for further defrosting, thus contaminating the incised tissues and body cavities of the carcasses with the dirty water containing fecal matter and other wastes. In one plant not operating under continuous official sanitation supervision, the owner volunteered the information that he sometimes sold lots of New York-dressed poultry to the plant mentioned above, where it was then eviscerated under inspection.

In a large plant producing New York-dressed poultry, it was observed that the carcasses were not being washed at any time. The official sanitation supervisor, and his superior who happened to be in the plant that day, explained that the wash machines had been cut off because the private water supply used by this plant was not providing enough water. The poultry was being placed in cartons bearing labels indicating production under official sanitation supervision.

5. Scruggs (2) reported a visit to a plant in a heavy production area which was processing "inspected" poultry for a major metropolitan market. He described the conditions in this plant as being extremely bad, to the point that "both the employees and the food product that they were handling were being bathed constantly in an aerosol of intestinal contents". The official inspector in the plant was not doing a satisfactory job of inspection, resulting in this comment by Dr. Scruggs: "Such a practice, and this is not an isolated circumstance, is nothing short of prostituting the veterinary profession in order to gain a marketing advantage by furnishing 'inspected' poultry".

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS PROMISE IMPROVEMENTS

Several things indicate an increased realization of the need for definitive action by official agencies in the field of poultry sanitation.

The interest and cooperation of the poultry industry, of Federal, State, and local agencies, and of professional associations, has resulted in the development by the Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, of a suggested poultry ordinance for consideration by State and local jurisdictions (1). The general provisions and sanitation requirements were published in April 1955. The pro-

visions dealing with ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection of poultry are now ready for official clearances, and will be incorporated with the sanitation requirements for publication as a complete inspection and sanitation ordinance.

Several organizations, including the U.S. Livestock Sanitary Association, the Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, have gone on record recommending the adoption of the Public Health Service poultry-inspection ordinance when it becomes available. Much interest has been expressed in the various States. The Institute of American Poultry Industries has adopted a resolution favoring the "development and adoption of sound, mandatory inspection for wholesomeness programs for all poultry and poultry products, provided such programs are paid for from federal and state funds." The Conference of State and Territorial Health Officers has adopted a resolution calling for the evisceration, and the inspection before and after slaughter, of all poultry shipped interstate.

Finally, several bills introduced into the current session of Congress (2nd Session, 84th Congress), call for amendment of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, so as to prohibit the movement in interstate or foreign commerce of unsound, unhealthful, diseased, unwholesome, or adulterated poultry or poultry products. As introduced, these bills would provide for mandatory official inspection-for-wholesomeness of all poultry and poultry products processed for interstate commerce. Other bills which have been introduced would provide for mandatory inspection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of poultry and poultry products processed for interstate com-

merce and, furthermore, of poultry and poultry products processed, sold, received, or delivered in cities or areas designated through a prescribed procedure by the Secretary of Agriculture as being "cities or areas where poultry or poultry products are handled or consumed in such volume as to affect, burden, or obstruct the movement of inspected poultry products" in interstate commerce, granting the Secretary of Agriculture exclusive jurisdiction in the fields within the scope of the bills. Other proposed legislation would provide for the mandatory inspection of poultry by the Meat Inspection Branch, U.S.D.A., on a basis comparable to the present Federal inspection of red meats.

SUMMARY

Although significant progress has been made, there is an obvious need for more consistent and widespread application of known principles of sanitation to the poultry industry. Associated with this need, indeed inseparable from it if the consumer is to be assured of wholesome and acceptable poultry and poultry products, is the necessity for adequate official inspection for wholesomeness of poultry. Recognition of these needs has resulted in a number of current developments which are directed toward the establishment of mandatory official poultry-inspection programs at the Federal, State, and local levels.

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