

## AFFIDAVIT

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a meat inspector for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). I am submitting this affidavit freely and voluntarily to Alyssa Doom, who has identified herself to me as the investigator for the Food Integrity Campaign of the Government Accountability Project. I am doing so without any threats, inducements or coercion. I authorize the publication of this statement contingent upon the redaction of my name, and the name and location of the establishment to which I refer. I am making this statement to explain how the HIMP system has gone astray in the plant where I am stationed.

I have been a federal inspector for [REDACTED] years and stationed at the plant I am currently in for [REDACTED]. This plant implemented USDA's high speed inspection model about [REDACTED] years ago. Under the model, USDA inspectors' jobs change drastically. Instead of doing physical inspection we are now supposed to monitor plant process control workers who take over many of our on-line inspection duties.

In general, the program is not a bad idea. Because the industry profits from inspection, I believe they should have to pay for it. This is sort of what happens under HIMP. The plant employees are now paid to inspect the product while the USDA is still available to act as a watchdog and make sure the plant workers are doing their tasks correctly. However, when USDA loses the authority to make plant employees engage in corrective actions, the program stops working. This is what has happened at the plant where I work.

Initially when the agency and industry switched over to the program, it worked pretty well. There seemed to be a lot of input from USDA in Washington, DC about the program. But when the union sued USDA shortly afterward, there were a lot of hard feelings. The agency pretty much lost interest in what industry was doing and inspectors were left on their own to devise ways to enforce the regulations in the plant. When we try to point out problems in the slaughter process, we are berated by company management. Our upper-management no longer backs up those inspectors who are actually trying to do

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their jobs.

The agency does not seem too concerned with monitoring the HIMP program in this plant either. Before the company went HIMP, line speeds were running at about [REDACTED] carcasses per hour, which is the maximum under traditional inspection. Since the company switched to the new model line speeds have increased [REDACTED] times and are now running at up to [REDACTED] carcasses per hour on one line. This speed is much too fast, in my opinion. In all of this time since HIMP was implemented the agency has never reevaluated how well the program was working in this plant, despite their promise to monitor the system each time line speeds changed. I do not put a lot of faith or credence in the agency's word or promises. In fact, at one time an agency official publicly announced that none of the HIMP pilot plants were running over 1,200 carcasses per hour, which was completely false, based on the number my plant was then running.

I have some doubts about the plant inspectors' abilities to conduct inspection as well as USDA inspectors because their training is severely lacking. While most of the USDA-trained staff receives a week's worth of training before being put on the slaughter line, plant process control workers only go through a short orientation and are given a small booklet illustrating various pathologies on a carcass before starting on the line. The company management is more production-oriented so they do not focus much on food safety and removing adulterated product. Actually, employees are discouraged from removing adulterated products from the line. Of course, plant process control workers are going to do what their bosses tell them to since they do not have a lot of job security.

HIMP might work better if USDA inspectors actually had the authority to engage in real oversight, meaning the ability to do something when the company was violating regulations. This certainly is not the case in the plant where I am stationed. If USDA inspectors try to engage in any enforcement, company management personnel criticize us. USDA upper-management takes the industry's side and supports their decisions over those of federal inspectors. This happens on a daily

basis. Because of this some inspectors actually feel discouraged from doing their job to protect consumers. It makes sense, because nobody wants to stand out there and take a beating from the company while not having support from their supervisor.

It also seems to be the case that newer USDA inspectors are not receiving the same training as those of us who started with the agency earlier. For example, the training for USDA HIMP inspectors used to consist of an entire week of teaching under a certified instructor, but new inspectors coming in only receive a book about the program and then come down to the floor to shadow another USDA inspector. Additionally, new inspectors coming into the agency rarely have a strong slaughter background. Without this experience and the knowledge they should receive from training, it's difficult for inspectors to be able to do this job with line speeds running as fast as they do under HIMP. The agency may have had good intentions with the program, but the way it is running is pretty pathetic.

As a result of a poorly trained inspection staff and the pushback USDA inspectors are receiving, product contamination at this plant has increased dramatically under HIMP. One of the leading causes of contamination, in my opinion, begins during the stunning stage. Hogs in the plant are stunned at very high amperage of electricity which causes the animal's pelvis to break and leads to bruising, blood clots, broken tissue, and the creation of bone shards. This produces the perfect storm because the animal's bung is dragged through this contamination and into the inspection station, where much of it ends up going undetected because animals are flying by so quickly. The high amperage of stunning also leads to more bruising and blood clots on the animal, which provides a growing medium for bacteria, such as salmonella. It is interesting that the agency has decided that bruises and blood clots aren't much of a contamination issue anymore. Unless science has changed—and I'm pretty sure it hasn't – this is where contamination is going to occur first on the product.

Other contamination such as hair, toenails, cystic kidneys, and bladder stems has increased under HIMP. Line speeds don't make it any easier to detect contamination. Most of the time they are

running so fast it is impossible to see anything on the carcass. I am opposed to a lot of the contamination that they now allow to enter the cooler. It really is shameful that the agency allows so much contamination permitted on the product. Up until about 4 years ago, USDA inspectors were making plant process workers trim most of this stuff off on the kill side. Then upper management pretty much laid the law down and said from here on out we would not be railing out hogs for trimming (a process involving cutting contamination off a carcass). Instead we were to notify the plant about how much contamination we were seeing and let it go. We were told they would take care of this stuff on the processing side.

Under HIMP, when certain types of contamination are identified on a carcass, for example, bone shards, the plant process workers mark it with a blue crayon and let it go on to the cut floor/cooler. When contaminated products enter the cut floor, which is the processing side of the plant, there is only one USDA inspector who is tasked with identifying everything that was missed on the slaughter side of the plant. It takes roughly [REDACTED] seconds for the hog to go from one end of the cut floor to the other. There's no way that one processing inspector can keep up with all that is happening over there.

Under the HIMP program USDA keeps track of food quality and safety defects. Food safety defects result in a product that must be condemned because it is not fit for human consumption. Food quality defects are not considered unsafe but have instead been determined to be dressing defects that consumers would consider unwholesome. USDA came up with 3 categories of these food quality defects, which they call "Other Consumer Protections" (OCPs). The agency set performance standards for the percent of OCP contamination that would be allowed on carcasses for each category. In the third of these categories, "Miscellaneous", the agency set the performance standards at 20.5%, meaning that 20.5% of the carcasses entering the cooler per shift (which is up to 9,500 carcasses at a time) could contain a defect that was considered to be in this category. This includes things like bile, bruises, bone

fractures, scabs, toenails, and skin lesions. This means that when a USDA inspector sees this type of contamination they basically have to let it go into through the process into the cut floor because the Agency allows it under HIMP regulations. They believe that process control workers will detect contamination, but at the speed the lines run in this plant it is often missed. If we do notice that the plant has exceeded this 20.5% standard, we are supposed to notify the plant supervisor who would, in theory, take care of the problem. But that never happens. Contamination will go by all of the time and inspectors do not notify the plant supervisors or the USDA veterinarians. They know nothing will get fixed. So this 20.5% standards is pretty much meaningless.

When I first started working for FSIS an older inspector told me regarding my job duties, “It’s not whether or not people are going to eat shit—they are. It’s just how much.” When HIMP was originally implemented, I had high hopes that the program would improve food safety. Over the past few years, I have learned that is not the case. Instead it seems like it is just the USDA’s way of catering to the industry instead of the consumer. I do not support the HIMP program as is currently implemented.

I, [REDACTED], have reviewed this statement of 5 pages and hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.  
Dated this \_\_\_ day of October, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Sworn and subscribed before me this \_\_\_ day of October, 2014.

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(Notary Signature)