

Appleseed This Week

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A nonprofit network of 16 public interest justice centers in the U.S. and Mexico, Appleseed is dedicated to building a society in which opportunities are genuine, access to justice is universal and equal, and government advances the public interest.

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WORKER COMMENTS

"They scream at you, they humiliate you." "The line is too fast." "Please try to

Meatpacking Industry Mistreats Workers

Nebraska Center Proposes Reforms in New Report

Driving an effort to ensure the humane treatment of meatpacking workers, Nebraska Appleseed recently released a major study of on-the-job health and safety. The Center surveyed 455 workers in five communities across Nebraska - one of the country's largest meat producers - to assess working conditions from the perspective of those who face them daily.

The report, "[The Speed Kills You: The Voice of Nebraska's Meatpacking Workers](#)," presents many recommendations for preventing the mistreatment of workers - many of them immigrants - in one of America's most dangerous professions.

One hundred years after Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle" and almost a decade after the creation of Nebraska's Meatpacking Industry Workers Bill of Rights, meatpackers continue to describe crippling work speed, verbal abuse and humiliation by supervisors, and denial even of such basic rights as bathroom breaks. Hundreds of written comments submitted with the surveys provide disturbing insight. Please see the side bar for examples.

The primary concern expressed by workers was speed of work - caused by both line speed and failure to maintain sufficient staffing - leading to injuries from the repetitive motion of making thousands of cuts per day. Suffering from swollen hands and limbs curled beyond use, many workers disregard the initial pain, not recognizing its seriousness until muscles, tendons, and bones are damaged beyond repair.

Such injuries leave individuals unable to perform even the most basic daily tasks and are often exacerbated by a lack of proper medical care. Workers expressed serious concerns with the neutrality of company-employed or company-recommended

do something about the speed of the line." "I know of three people who urinated and pooped in their pants on the line and afterwards they laugh at you." "They give you ice, they give you hot water, they sell you pills and tell you that you have to learn to live with the pain." "Imagine that people wet their pants on the line. What safety is there in the product?"

medical providers, feeling their injury reports were discounted or dismissed entirely.

"The public wants to know that meat is produced under safe conditions for the human beings doing the work," said Becky Gould, Executive Director of Nebraska Appleseed. "The question is - what are the next steps we will take?"

Described in detail in the report, the Center's recommendations, are designed to protect workers' rights, dignity, health, and safety through reforms at both the state and federal levels. In addition, Nebraska Appleseed calls on consumers to be more selective at grocery stores and restaurants to help promote a market for food produced under safe, healthy conditions for both workers and the environment.

To view the report, including a sample of workers' hundreds of written comments, [click here](#).