



Agricultural Worker Justice Act of 2026

Section by Section Summary

Section 1. Short Title

Section 2. Table of Contents

Title I— Fair USDA Procurement and Contracting

Title I of the bill contains several sections that introduce regulations and requirements related to the procurement and contracting practices of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Section 101 – Definitions

Provides definitions for specific terms used in the bill. It clarifies that "meat" and "meat food product" have the meanings defined in the Federal Meat Inspection Act, while "poultry" and "poultry product" have the meanings defined in the Poultry Products Inspection Act. Additionally, the term "processed food" is given the meaning defined in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

Section 102 – Food Worker Pay Increase

- (a) Prohibits the purchasing any meat, meat food product, poultry, poultry product, or processed food produced by workers in the United States who are compensated at a rate lower than the prevailing rate for wages and fringe benefits in their locality.
- (b) Requires the Secretary of Labor to determine the prevailing rates described in subsection (a) and, in doing so, requires they take into account any applicable existing collective bargaining agreements in the locality.
- (c) Establishes a prevailing rate established in this section does not supersede the wages and benefits that workers agree to in collective bargaining agreements.

Section 103 – Prohibition on Stock Buybacks While Receiving USDA Funds

- (a) Defines key terms, such as “equity security”, “exchange”, “issuer” and “national securities exchange”
- (b) Prohibits the agricultural issuer from purchasing its own equity securities on a national securities exchange or paying dividends or other capital distributions on its equity securities during any period that an agricultural issuer has a contract or receives funding from the Department of Agriculture.

Section 104 – Promotion of Economic Security and Workplace Accountability

- (a) Requires entities that enter into contracts with the Department of Agriculture to disclose any labor law violations in the preceding 3-year period. The Secretary of Labor will coordinate with other agencies to prepare a list of ineligible entities based on violations, and the Secretary of Agriculture will be prohibited from soliciting contracts from those entities and conducting inspections of their facilities.
- (b) Requires the Secretary of Labor to be available for consultation with entities described in subsection (a).
- (c) Requires the Secretary of Labor, on an annual basis, to evaluate corrective measures taken by entities who made disclosures on labor compliance violations under (a).
- (d) Establishes that the Secretary of Labor must prepare and submit to the Secretary of Agriculture a list of each entity that is ineligible for a contract with the USDA based on repeated or pervasive violations of the law, the failure of an entity to complete corrective measures. The Secretary of Agriculture cannot solicit contracts from entities or conduct inspections of any facility owned or controlled by an entity on the list for that year or any of the Administration's term.
- (e) Requires the Secretary of Labor to coordinate with the National Labor Relations Board, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Environmental Protection Agency, or any other relevant Federal agency, States and local governments in providing consultation.
- (f) Establishes that it is unlawful for an entity to knowingly fail to make a disclosure.
- (g) Requires the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a report to the House and Senate Committees on Agriculture each year beginning with the first calendar year that begins after the date two years after the bill is enacted. Requires the report to include the number of entities on the list under subsection (d) for each year of the report, the number of entities that agreed to take corrective measures under subsection (c) for such year, the amount of applicable contracts for the entities described (f), and performance indicators and measures to assess the effectiveness of the implementation by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Section 105 – Waiver to Purchase Foreign Commodities or Products

- (a) Amends the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to allow school food authorities to request waivers for purchasing foreign commodities or products. The waivers can be granted if the commodities or products are not available domestically or if the domestic options are insufficient in quantity or quality, and the school food authorities must make the waivers publicly available and notify parents or guardians of the students served the foreign commodities or products.
- (b) Defines key terms, such as “domestic commodity”, “foreign commodity or product”.
- (c) Adds conforming amendments the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act.
- (d) Establishes that nothing in this section affects the requirements of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018.

Section 106 – Authorization of Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program

Authorizes an appropriation of \$400 million annually for the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program established under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

Section 107 – Report Regarding Grant Recipients

Requires the Secretary of Agriculture to provide an annual report within 180 days of this Act's enactment and every year after, listing the recipients of funding from the Secretary, including organizations, farms, individuals, or other entities that received funding through contracts, subcontracts, subsidies, loans, or grants.

Title II — Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers

This title of the bill focuses on addressing the safety and well-being of meat and poultry processing workers.

Section 201 – Findings

Highlights that meat and poultry workers have higher injury rates compared to other industries, including amputations, sprains, lacerations, and musculoskeletal injuries. It also acknowledges the exploitative conditions and abusive behavior faced by these workers, including shouting, harassment, sexualized language, sexual harassment, and assaults.

Section 202 – Definitions

Defines "covered establishment" as an official establishment subject to inspection under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act. It also defines "employee" and "employer" according to the meanings given in the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970.

Subtitle A—Reforms to Protect Meat and Poultry Processing Workers **Part 1—Department of Agriculture**

Section 211 – Rule on Increased Line Speeds at Meat and Poultry Establishments

- (a) Defines key terms, such as “Administrator” which means the Administrator of Service, the “Assistant Secretary, which means the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, the “Director” which refers to the Director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and “Secretary” refers to the Secretary of Agriculture.
- (b) Introduced a rule that restricts the Secretary from issuing waivers that could result in higher line speeds at meat and poultry establishments or inspection staffing requirements unless the Secretary certifies that any increases in line speeds would not have an adverse impact on worker safety after an inspection. State laws with stricter worker safety or animal welfare requirements are not affected.
- (c) Mandates transparency in rulemaking.
- (d) Requires evaluation of the impact of rulemaking.
- (e) Mandates report on the implementation of rules by an industrial engineer.

Part 2 – Fair Attendance Policies

Section 221 – Definitions

Defines key terms, such as "covered entity" which includes employing offices and entities covered by civil rights laws, and "employee" which includes various categories of workers. It also establishes definitions for "legally protected leave" as leave protected by applicable laws, "no fault attendance policy" as a policy that penalizes employees for absences or lateness

through point-based disciplinary actions, “person” as one or more individuals, governments, associations etc., and the “Secretary” as the Secretary of Labor.

Section 222 – Requirements for Employers Relating to No Fault Attendance Policies or Attendance Systems

- (a) Establishes that it is unlawful for a covered entity to maintain a no-fault attendance policy unless certain conditions are met, such as distributing the policy in writing to employees, providing access to the policy, explicitly stating that employees will not face adverse consequences for legally protected leave, and establishing a process for reporting and addressing absences related to legally protected leave.
- (b) Prohibits covered entities from maintaining attendance systems that discourage employees from exercising their rights to legally protected leave.

Section 223 – Remedies and Enforcement

- (a) Extends the powers, remedies, and procedures of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 to individuals alleging an unlawful employment practice
- (b) Imposes civil penalties on covered entities that engage in such practices.

Section 224 – Rulemaking

Requires the Secretary to issue accessible regulations to implement this part, including an illustrative model of a no-fault attendance policy that meets the requirements outlined within two years of the enactment of this Act, in collaboration with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other relevant Federal agencies.

Section 225 – Relationship to Other Laws

Clarifies that this Act does not nullify or restrict the powers, remedies, and procedures available under any Federal or state law that grants legally protected leave.

PART 3— Occupational Safety and Health Administration Reforms

Section 231 – Definitions

Defines “Secretary” to mean the Secretary of Labor, and “State” to mean a State of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

Section 232 – Ensuring Compliance with Employee Rights to Use Toilet Facilities at Covered Establishments

- (a) Requires the Secretary to ensure that employers at covered establishments comply with regulations regarding employee access to toilet facilities
- (b) Requires Secretary to verify that employers allow breaks without punishment, provide an adequate number of facilities, avoid unreasonable restrictions, prevent extended delays, and compensate employees for breaks in accordance with relevant laws, during inspections conducted under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Section 233 – Occupational Safety and Health Standards to Protect Employees in Covered Establishments

- (a) Requires the Secretary, within one year of enactment, to publish in the Federal Register a proposed standard for ergonomic program management for covered establishments. These standards include requirements for hazard identification and ergonomic job evaluations, hazard control, trainings, and medical management. Requires the Secretary, not less than 30 months after date of enactment, to publish in the Federal Register a final standard based on the proposed standard.
- (b) Requires the Secretary, within three months of enactment, to publish in the Federal Register a proposed standard requiring that all employers with employees working at a covered establishment are required to have a person readily available at the establishment who is adequately trained to administer first aid.
- (c) Appropriates \$2 million for fiscal year 2026 to carry out this section.

Section 234 – Permanent Regional Emphasis Inspection Program; Expanding Inspections

- (a) Requires the Secretary, within 30 days of enactment, to establish a regional emphasis inspection program for covered establishments in every state, focusing on amputation hazards, ergonomics, line speed hazards, bathroom breaks, chemical use, and working conditions in extreme temperatures.
- (b) Requires the inspection to be expanded to cover all areas of the establishment, if the Secretary determines that a work-related injury or illness is possibly related to a workplace danger.

Section 235 – Representatives during Physical Inspections

- (a) Requires the Secretary, within one year of enactment, to propose a regulation that allows employee-authorized representatives to accompany the Secretary during physical inspections of covered establishments. Allows employees to designate a person affiliated with a worker-based community organization to serve as the representative, if no employee representative is available.
- (b) The final rule for this proposal must be published within two years of enactment.

Section 236 – Enhanced Protections from Retaliation

- (a) Strengthens existing protections against retaliation from employers when employees refuse to perform work duties under conditions of reasonable apprehension.
- (b) Prohibits retaliation and establishes procedures for filing complaints, conducting investigations, and holding hearings in cases of alleged retaliation.
- (c) Requires the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission to consider previous violations of the employer related to employee retaliation when deciding to assess civil penalties.

Section 237 – Regulations to Restore a Column on Required Records of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders

Requires the Secretary of Labor to issue a final rule within one year on work-related musculoskeletal disorders reporting.

Section 238 – Funding for Additional OSHA Inspections

Appropriates \$60 million each year from 2026 to 2031 for the hiring of additional OSHA inspectors.

Section 239 – OSHA Reporting

- (a) Defines key terms, such as “pandemic” to mean a public health emergency declared under Public Health Service Act.
- (b) Establishes a standardized reporting process for covered establishments to report information regarding infections and deaths related to a pandemic, including employee demographics, and requires the Secretary to make this information available to the public while safeguarding privacy.
- (c) Mandates covered establishments to disclose all chemicals used at the worksite in the native language of the employees or individuals providing work.

Section 240 – Private Right of Action

- (a) Grants any person aggrieved by a covered establishment's failure to comply with OSHA the right to file a lawsuit.
- (b) Allows any person to seek equitable and legal relief, including compensatory and punitive damages, attorney's fees, and costs of the action.
- (c) Establishes that any administrative enforcement by the Secretary does not preclude relief afforded.

Section 241 – Injunction Proceedings

Provides employees at an establishment where the Secretary of Labor has filed an action to get an injunction to stop an imminent danger the right to intervene in that action as a matter of right.

Part 4—Savings Provision

Section 251 – Savings Provision

Clarifies that nothing in the subtitle should diminish the rights, privileges, or remedies of any employee who exercises rights under federal or state law, common law, or any collective bargaining agreement.

Subtitle B — GAO Reports

Section 261 – Review and Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Meat and Poultry Processing

- (a) Requires the Comptroller General of the United States, within 180 days of enactment, to conduct a review and submit a report to Congress on racial and ethnic disparities in the meat and poultry processing sector.
- (b) Establishes the report must cover impacts on individuals working in covered establishments, including employees, temporary workers, incarcerated workers, and noncitizen workers. Establishes the report must examine workplace injuries, mental health conditions, exposure to chemicals, abuse, racial demographics, use of temporary and incarcerated workers, and the treatment of noncitizen workers.