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During slaughter and processing

The slaughterhouse is a potential source for Salmonella contamination of poultry meat. These bacteria are transferred to the carcass and contaminate the meat during the slaughter process if the slaughterhouse does not maintain strict hygiene controls.

Poultry processors need to control and prevent Salmonella contamination in the processing plant by complying with regulatory requirements related to HACCP, identifying and implementing pre- and post-harvest interventions and using microbial testing results to monitor the performance of their HACCP system and to inform decision-making.

The slaughterhouse is divided into two main zones:

- Dirty zone - this is where slaughtering, bleeding, scalding, defeathering and evisceration takes place.
- Clean Zone - this is where procedures are carried out at low temperatures and under strict hygiene controls.

Problems of Salmonella contamination can start right at the very start of the process when the birds are received into the slaughtering plant. The cleanliness of the birds is a major source of contamination. Transpiration of a salmonella-positive flock leads to contamination of the crates and containers. Crates, containers and vehicles should all be cleaned and disinfected each time after unloading a flock. Strict hygiene regimes at this point can help to reduce the threat of contamination. Plants should also monitor and restrict the movement of staff, who could transfer contamination from dirty areas to clean areas on boots and clothing.

By taking action on the farm with feed withdrawal practices, it can reduce problems with excess faeces that might be expressed during the hanging, stunning and slaughter process, and in turn reduces the levels of Salmonella on the carcass and feathers that then get carried forward to the next stages of the slaughter process. Feed should be withdrawn from the birds between eight and 12 hours before the slaughter time.

While stunning reduces struggling and convulsions, wing flapping and quivering that happens because of the electrical stunning can transfer bacterial pathogens from the inside to the outside of the bird and to nearby birds and equipment.

Salmonella contamination of poultry meat does not stop after slaughtering, it is ongoing both during meat cutting and meat processing.