

# North Carolina's Poultry Industry

By The Numbers

How big is the industry?

There are approximately 28,000 poultry processing workers in the state of North Carolina<sup>1</sup>.

This past year, the North Carolina poultry industry raised and slaughtered **713,017,000 broilers** (i.e. meat chickens), producing 3,723,730,000 **lbs. of chicken meat** in the process.<sup>2</sup> This placed North Carolina 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation in both of these areas (behind Georgia, Arkansas, and Alabama, respectively).<sup>3</sup>

In 2006 (the most recent year for which such data is available), the chicken meat industry generated **\$2,088,212,000** in cash receipts for North Carolina – a figure which represents **25.5% of the total agricultural take** for the year, tobacco included. When other portions of the poultry industry are added to the mix (e.g. turkeys, chicken eggs, etc.), those figures jump to **\$2,911,615,000 and 35.5%**, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

## Poultry is the top income generating agricultural commodity for North Carolina

Rank	Item	Million Dollars
1	Broiler Chickens	2,088
2	Hogs	1,917
3	Greenhouse/Nursery/Floriculture	893
4	Turkeys	518
5	Tobacco	496
6	Cotton	303
7	Chicken eggs	258
8	Soybeans	244
9	Cattle and calves	236
10	Corn	218

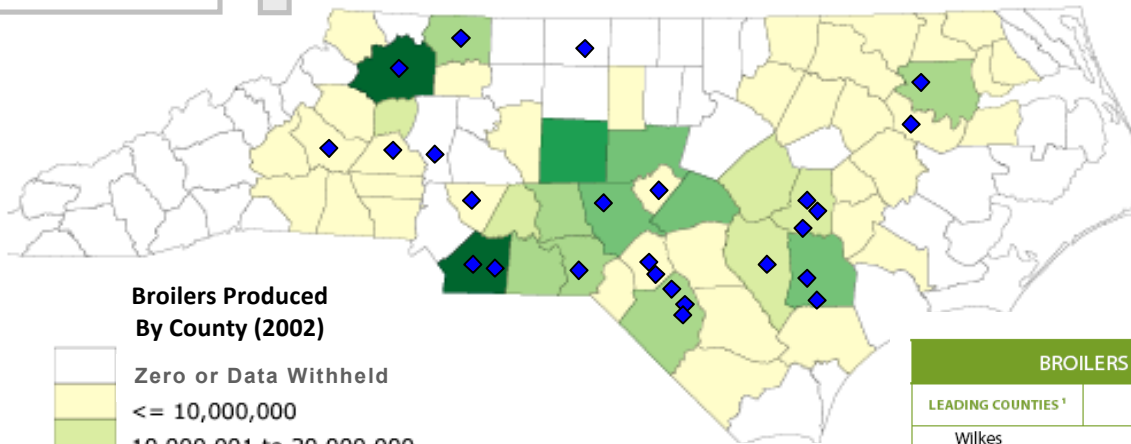
<sup>1</sup> "Poultry Series Exposes New Silent Subclass," Charlotte Observer, February 10, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> US Dept of Agriculture – National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/North\\_Carolina/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/North_Carolina/index.asp) (Accessed: August 22, 2008).

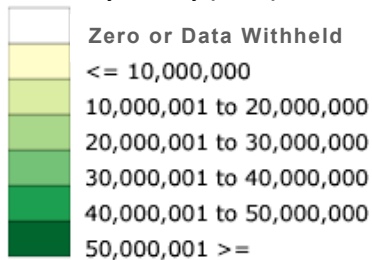
<sup>3</sup> U.S. Poultry and Egg Association Website. [http://www.poultryegg.org/economic\\_data/](http://www.poultryegg.org/economic_data/) (Accessed: August 22, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Ag. Statistics - 2007 Annual Statistics Book . <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/2007AgStat/CashReceiptsfromFarming.pdf> (Accessed: August 25, 2008)

Where are we talking about?



**Broilers Produced By County (2002)**



**Poultry Processing Plant Locations**



BROILERS	
LEADING COUNTIES <sup>1</sup>	NUMBER
Wilkes	91,700,000
Union	88,300,000
Randolph	47,000,000
Moore	36,000,000
Chatham	32,400,000
Richmond	31,400,000
Duplin	31,000,000
Anson	27,900,000
Harnett	27,800,000
Surry	26,200,000

<sup>1</sup> Ranking of Published Counties Only

Which companies are involved?

Perdue Farms, Inc.  
 Tyson Foods, Inc.  
 Prestage Farms, Inc.  
 Keystone Foods, LLC  
 Goldsboro Milling Co.

House of Raeford Farms, Inc.  
 Pilgrim's Pride Corp.  
 Carolina Turkey (Butterball LLC)  
 Tar Heel Turkey Hatchery, Inc.

Case Foods, Inc.  
 Wayne Farms, LLC  
 Cargill, Inc.  
 Mountaire Farms

What about the workers?

Low Wages, High Risks

*Poultry plant worker wages in 2007- 2008<sup>5,6</sup>:*

Type of work	Estimated Employment	Estimated Entry Wage	Average Wage	Estimated Experienced Wage	Mean Annual Wage
Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers	7,550 workers	\$8.46	\$9.61	\$10.18	\$19,700
Slaughterers and Meat Packers	7,960 workers	\$8.17	\$9.77	\$10.56	\$20,300

<sup>5</sup> US Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2007 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates – North Carolina. [http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nc.htm#b51-0000](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nc.htm#b51-0000) (Accessed: August 25, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> NC Employment Security Commission, Occupational Employment and Wages in North Carolina. **SOC codes: 51-3022 and 51-3033.** <http://esimi23.esc.state.nc.us/oeswage/index.asp> (Accessed: August 26, 2008).

## How bad are safety and health conditions in the plants?

“Like black lung in the coal industry and brown lung in the textile industry, the hands [of the workers in] the poultry industry suffer a long-neglected threat,” wrote Charlotte Observer reports on their investigative series “The Cruellest Cuts: The human cost of bringing poultry to your table”

- Workers’ hands become so damaged from carpal tunnel syndrome and other musculoskeletal disorders that they become unable to grab a spoon, button their shirt or pick up a glass of water.

### PREVELANCE OF INJURIES

- According to OSHA about 100 poultry workers have been killed on the job in the past decade and over 300,000 have been injured. This is a rate higher than that of manufacturing as a whole.
- A House of Raeford plant in NC showed a low injury rate of 3.5/ 100 workers, suspiciously below the 16.6/100 worker average that government statistics track—a rate that is criticized by workers and advocates as artificially low in itself
- OSHA officials admit that 2-3 times as many injuries have probably gone unreported
- OSHA inspections of poultry plants have dropped to their lowest rate in 15 years
- Fines for serious violations—including conditions that could cause death or disabling injuries—are usually cut by more than half, to an average of \$1100 (found the Charlotte Observer investigators in NC). “Tyson Foods, a multi-billion dollar company, makes that much profit every 3 minutes,” Observer reporters wrote.
- In a Duke University study conducted by epidemiologist Dr. Hester Lipscomb, of 300 workers interviewed, 43% reported symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders<sup>7</sup>
- Similarly, in a Wake Forest University study conducted by Dr. Sara Quandt 46% of poultry workers surveyed reported problems with their arm, wrist or hand<sup>8</sup>
- Employers are no longer required to track injuries that are caused by repetitive work
- Government is inspecting poultry plants less because fewer injuries are being reported, yet is rarely checks to see if these reports are accurate. This has led to the House Labor and Education Committee to call for a hearing on OSHA record keeping.

### SILENCING WORKERS

- Dr. Quandt’s study, referenced above, also found:
  - 89.3% rated the possibility of possibility of being injured at work in the next 12 months very likely;
  - only 19% said that supervisors did as much as possible to make their job safe, whereas 64.5% said that they felt their supervisors were only interested in doing the job fast and cheap;

<sup>7</sup> HJ Lipscomb et al, “Musculoskeletal Symptoms among Poultry Processing Workers and a Community Comparison Group: Black Women in Low-Wage Jobs in the Rural South,” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 50:327-338 (2007).

<sup>8</sup> Sara Quandt et al, “Occupational Illnesses and Injuries among Latino Poultry Workers in Western North Carolina,” Center for Latino Health Research, Department of Community and Family Medicine, Wake Forest University School of Medicine (2005).

- Workers who complain are often told the door is open for them to leave and that there are hundreds of others waiting for their job
- Job turnover is over 100% per year
- The rise of safety-incentive programs discourages workers from reporting injuries. These programs typically function where workers are awarded for reaching certain production goals without any reported lost work time injuries. Workers are rewarded with prizes varying from a free chicken lunch to T-shirts, gift certificates, bonus pay or even an entry into a raffle to win a free pick up truck. Workers put pressure on their fellow workers not to report injuries so that they don't blow their chance for the whole department to win the prize.

### What are the Health and Safety risks?

1. Repetitive motion injuries to wrists, fingers, elbows, shoulders and neck causing permanent nerve damage
2. Lacerations and amputations
3. Strains, sprains, contusions (primarily from slipping and falling)
4. Chemical exposure
5. Exposure to cold, damp conditions