

Chlorine Wash Doesn't Remove Salmonella on Chicken

The majority of chicken for purchase in the United States has been subjected to a chlorine cleaning, a simple yet problematic procedure currently banned by the European Union. Farming practices in the U.S. like overcrowding and lax welfare standards have prompted companies to wash poultry with chlorinated water to meet health and safety standards. The E.U. does not accept treated poultry, but American poultry producers hoping to sell their wares in a post-Brexit Britain may be stymied by a new study that found bacteria like salmonella and listeria remained active after the controversial chlorine wash.

False Positives

Microbiologists from the University of Southampton discovered that the American chicken cleaning process does more to camouflage the bacteria than it does to neutralize it. The chlorine washing makes it impossible to culture the chicken in a lab, making poultry treated like this appear less likely to spread food poisoning. Professor William Keevil led the university team behind the study from Southampton.

We therefore tested the strains of listeria and salmonella that we had chlorine-washed on nematodes [roundworms], which have a relatively complex digestive system...All of them died. Many companies and scientists have built their reputations promoting anti-microbial products. This research questions everything they've done."

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Bigger Does Not Mean Better

Faulty food safety tests and American factory farming are a dangerous combination.

The majority of the British population is against introducing American poultry that's been treated with chlorine. Poultry farmers in the U.K. concentrate their food safety efforts on the birds while they're still alive, relying on smaller flock densities to avoid rampant infections. The conditions in U.S. poultry facilities allow bacteria to thrive. Instances of food poisoning may be ten times higher in the U.S. than in Europe. The U.S. has a much bigger system, but farmers choose sustainability for short-term gain.

If the U.K. accepts American chicken that has been treated with the chlorine wash at the end of its production cycle, the impact on public health could be serious. Kath Dalmeny, the chief executive of British food and farming pressure group Sustain, described the Southampton research as a wake-up call:

Those dead nematodes are telling us something. This research suggests US chlorine washing may give a false impression of food safety. Proper food safety relies on clean production methods with high animal welfare, resilience to disease, and full traceability and labeling – not just end-of-pipe chemical washes."

Doubling Down

The U.S. has long been able to rely on its status as a world leader to find markets for our products. There is a distinct possibility that period is over, and that isn't a bad thing. Factory farmed chicken might be cheaper from a money standpoint, but the world has only seen a portion of the actual bill in terms of our health, the environment, and human

rights. In that respect, the chlorine wash is an apt metaphor. The chicken has the appearance of clean chicken, but dig a little deeper and you'll find it's all on the surface.

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Sources:

- *Chicken safety fear as chlorine washing fails bacteria tests – The Guardian*
- *Will modern American farming methods soon dominate British agriculture? – New Food Magazine*
- *Too fat to stand and their flesh rots while they're alive: The REAL reason America's 'Frankenchickens' have to be washed with chlorine as US industrial farming practices are exposed ahead of possible post-Brexit trade deal – Daily Mail*