



Via Electronic Mail

April 23, 2020

The Vice President
Old Executive Office Building
Washington DC 20501

Dear Mr. Vice President:

Throughout this public health crisis, we have witnessed millions of America's food and retail workers who have worked on the frontlines of this coronavirus pandemic. These workers—union and non-union—have literally put their lives on the line to help feed this nation. At the same time, we have heard both federal and state elected leaders refer to these workers as essential, yet they are not being provided the essential protections they need to do their jobs safely. For the sake of these essential workers' lives, and the safety of our food supply, this must change immediately, and we must prioritize the safety and protection of all grocery workers and workers in meatpacking and food processing plants.

With respect to meatpacking workers, the state of the safety conditions in these plants is reaching crisis levels. To date, ten workers have died, hundreds have been sick or exposed, and thousands have lost work because of the closure of these meatpacking plants. As of today, over 25 percent of America's entire pork slaughter capacity is now shutdown, as well as 10 percent of beef slaughter capacity. The loss of such production, which is a direct result of workers getting sick and exposed, will inevitably lead to food shortages across this nation.

To address this growing safety and food supply threat, we sent Secretary Purdue five immediate safety recommendations that we urgently request the White House Coronavirus Task Force to adopt. These recommendations include the following:

- 1. Prioritize these Essential Workers for Testing:** Meatpacking and food processing workers must be prioritized for testing if we are going to protect the food supply and limit these plant closings.
- 2. Immediate Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Too many meatpacking members lack the critical personal protection equipment, and these workers must have PPE to do their jobs.

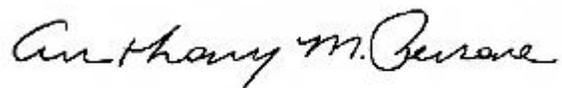
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3. **Immediate Halt On Line Speed Waivers:** In the first two weeks of this month, the USDA approved 11 regulatory waivers for poultry plants to increase their maximum line speed. These waivers guarantee more workers are put at risk of either catching or spreading the virus. The USDA must cease granting any new waivers and suspend all existing waivers that allow plants to operate at faster speeds.
4. **Mandate Social Distancing:** Companies must enforce and practice six-foot social and physical distancing to the greatest extent possible, even if this means production slows down. Where distancing is not possible, companies should use plexiglass barriers to separate and protect workers.
5. **Isolate Workers Who Show Symptoms or Test Positive for COVID-19:** It is critical to identify and isolate workers who have tested positive or who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19. These workers should be allowed to quarantine at home, with pay, per the recommendations set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Given the contagious nature of this pandemic, and the significant number of workers in these contained meatpacking plants and processing facilities, the above-mentioned recommendations are among the critical steps that we believe must be adopted as soon as humanely possible.

Finally, let me say the actions we propose have nothing to do with politics, or whether these workers are union or non-union. For the UFCW, this is about the life and death of essential workers, and the need to protect them and America's food supply. As such, please know that the UFCW stands ready to work together with you, the White House Coronavirus Task Force, as well as state elected leaders from both parties, to do what must be done to ensure the health and safety of all meatpacking and food workers.

Sincerely,



International President