



VIA E-MAIL

December 23, 2020

To All Governors in the United States

Re: Prioritizing Distribution of the COVID-19 Vaccine

For the reasons articulated below, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union and the North American Meat Institute (the organizations) respectfully request that frontline workers in the meat and poultry industry, including United States Department of Agriculture inspectors and graders, be given very high priority regarding the distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines, following health care workers and others in phase 1a.

Earlier this year the Department of Homeland Security identified food manufacturing as a critical infrastructure sector, which included meat and poultry workers who have been on the front lines to ensure Americans have access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food.¹

The challenges meatpacking companies and their employees faced in the early stages of the pandemic were unprecedented. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified meat industry workers as highly affected by the pandemic. However, the industry is resilient and the people who work in those facilities courageous. On December 20, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended prioritizing frontline essential workers, which includes food (meat industry) workers as part of the phase 1b vaccination process. Prioritizing vaccination for the diverse meat industry workforce maximizes ethical, scientific, and implementation considerations, using existing health systems to support essential workers and secure the food supply for all Americans.

Many meat and poultry establishments are top employers in rural communities that can experience challenges with access to adequate health care. Vaccinating meat and poultry workers will maximize the health of entire rural communities and increase health equity. This approach is also consistent with the views of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Committee on Equitable Allocation of Vaccine for the Novel Coronavirus, which concluded that people in the population group that includes meat and poultry workers "need to be provided the vaccine, and special efforts must be made to reach these workers in ways that encourage them to be vaccinated."²

¹ Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency. <https://www.cisa.gov/identifying-critical-infrastructure-during-covid-19>.

² Discussion Draft of the Preliminary Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine, p. 67.

Implementation considerations also support high prioritization for meat and poultry workers in Phase 1b vaccine allocation. Many larger meat and poultry establishments employ or contract with medical personnel to screen employees for COVID-19 symptoms, administer tests, and manage existing employee health programs, such as the annual Flu vaccine program. In many cases, administering the COVID-19 vaccine can fit into this existing health program infrastructure. For cases where off-site vaccination may be needed, we will work together to support information and access for workers.

We understand workers may have questions or concerns about vaccination. We commit to assist with education and information campaigns and materials that support vaccination goals in your State.

The entire country depends on meat and poultry workers to produce the food Americans need. For these reasons we respectfully request that, as you plan for distributing the vaccine, meatpacking workers and USDA personnel in those establishments be given high priority to receive vaccinations.

Respectfully submitted,

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