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By email

27 April 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to urge you to reject the suggestion of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture that the Emergency Measures Act be imposed to force people to work in meat plants that may or may not be safe. Rather, steps should be taken to establish and follow national standards to bring COVID-19 outbreaks in food processing plants under control and to maintain safe workplaces.

I represent food inspectors who work for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and without whom meat plants and other food production establishments cannot operate.

As you know, meat processing plants in Canada have become “hot spots” where the virus is spreading quickly. In spite of this, there is a patchwork of policies and procedures that leave people who work in these plants exposed to infection that could undermine food security for Canadians and spread the virus further.

Much of Canada’s beef supply is processed in Alberta. This is a national resource Canadians across the country rely upon. Despite the strategic importance of this national resource and the fact that federal employees are working in these facilities, our national regulatory institutions such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency have largely relinquished their oversight authority to provincial authorities.

In Alberta, provincial authorities appear to have set aside health and safety and public health concerns in the plant in favour of keeping them operating at any cost, including the health and even the lives of workers. For example, it has been reported that the decision to keep the Cargill plant in High River operating was made without setting foot in the plant and on the basis of a “remote inspection” of a live streamed cell phone video.

The absence of national standards to combat the spread of COVID-19 in meat processing establishments is in full view. The CFIA has provided only limited “[guidance](#)” to meat processing plants in Canada. Federal authorities have left it to plants and provincial authorities to decide what action is appropriate to safeguard food production and public health. As a result, an outbreak at the Olymel pork slaughter facility in Quebec led to a 14-day shutdown to ensure only non-infected staff returned to work. Meanwhile, owners of the JBS Canada plant in Brooks, Alberta continue to operate despite an outbreak of the virus in the plant. This is almost certain to lead to a repeat of the Cargill experience of widespread illness and possible loss of life.

Rather than forcing food processing plant workers, inspectors and veterinarians to work in unsafe conditions, the federal government should be taking extraordinary measures to ensure these workplaces are safe.

I am at your disposal to recommend measures to achieve this. My personal cell phone number is 613-715-3767 should your staff wish to discuss these.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fabian Murphy', written in a cursive style.

Fabian Murphy

National President

Président national

Agriculture Union, PSAC

Syndicat de l'Agriculture, AFPC

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